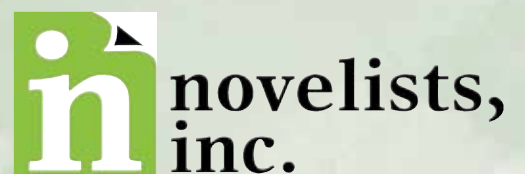


The official newsletter
of Novelists, Inc.,
a professional organization
of writers of popular fiction



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President's Voice

By Celeste Barclay



As this is my swan song President's Voice, I thought I would offer you some reflections and ruminations rather than "teachable moments."

It's truly been a pleasure and honor to serve as our organization's president. I've had the opportunity to serve with a Board that wholeheartedly and tirelessly supports our organization. A team who keeps our organization's best interests in the forefront of their minds and has dedicated hours of their time to ensure our organization remains the place to be in the fiction publishing world.

It's been humbling to see behind the scenes as our conference gains momentum each year. Our conference committee, of which I'm truly only a name on the letterhead, is dedicated, capable, and exemplary. As a recovering educator, I've spent more time in professional development than most people ever should. I left the profession feeling fully developed. But I gain so much from our conference each year. Having the opportunity to be a liaison between our organization and so many members of our industry was a privilege that gave me insights into topics that don't always get the attention they deserve. Each time a member brought something to my attention was a chance for me to learn, too. I feel richer for it all.

During this year, I've juggled my responsibilities to the organization along with my own unrelenting publishing schedule. I'm a self-imposed workaholic, and I know that. I embrace it because I'm finally in a career where there's truly never a morning where I dread going to work. I had my fair share of struggles and successes this year—I write this on a release day—just as everyone else. But I admire our community for its perseverance even in times of industry uncertainty. I congratulate each person who continues to push forward, building their own empire in whatever form it takes.

In a world where so many like to boast that they are or one day will write a book, we are an elite cadre who have not only completed that task but have turned this into a profession, be it a full-time job, a part-time job, a second or third job, or an only job. We have accomplished

something most people never will. Many of us have done that several times over. How we've gotten to these stages in our career—traditionally, indie, hybrid, small house, whatever—isn't as vital as knowing we have defeated the odds.

Before I sound too much more like a commencement speech, I'll share why I'm having this moment of gushing pride. I recently read the [Esquire](#) article "Has It Ever Been Harder To Make a Living as an Author?" that perpetuated one stereotype after another about all of us being naïve idealists. Not only did it focus almost solely on one portion of the publishing industry, but it also took a dig at traditionally published authors while ignoring indies entirely. In my humble opinion, it rambled like a granny who lost her false teeth. It went on and on, and on some more, bemoaning how it's a pitiful waste of time to attempt to be an author. It selectively quoted statistics from the Authors Guild's recent survey. They didn't misquote the information so much as had the age-old logical fallacy of conflating correlation and causation.

If you click on the link above, you can read it for yourself. Once I'd finished it, I was spurred to comment. More often than not, I'll think about my comment, all fire and brimstone ready to go, then opt to let my temper calm and walk away. However, this one must have gotten me just at the right moment. The gist of my comment was the article was misleading with antiquated thinking. It completely ignored the indie portion of the industry, and I tossed some of my own stats in there for good measure. It misrepresented traditionally published authors just as badly.

I generally don't toss titles around, and I've never wanted to abuse my title as president of our organization, but I felt compelled to speak on our behalf as an industry of professionals, not hobbyists. My comment earned me a kind email from one of our members and a supportive response directly in the article from another member. I spent nearly an hour speaking to an NPR reporter today who spotted my comment and accepted my invitation to contact me if anyone was interested in a more accurate assessment of our industry.

Do I think my single conversation is going to suddenly revolutionize the perception people have about us as starving artists or hopelessly naïve dreamers hoping to one day hit it big with a monstrous advance or people hiding in their parents' basements as they produce drivel to self-publish? Definitely not. Is it nice to feel heard? Absolutely. It felt like a victorious battle in a protracted war. Is this the hill everyone wants to die on? I know it's not. But is it worth using our voices and way with words to show the world we are legitimate businesspeople who bring worthy products into the world? I believe so.

If you're the strong, silent type, then keep on keeping on. Between those of us who like to raise our voices and those of us who like to keep our noses to the grindstone, we're thriving regardless of the naysayers, regardless of economy shifts, regardless of factors beyond our control with retailers. Just regardless. Some of us might be mid-listers, six-figure, or seven-figure authors. Some of us might hit lists. Some of us might have better years and worse years. Some of us might take a step back before returning to the trenches. All of us have proven we *aren't* a bunch of pie-in-the-sky wannabes engaged in a worthless pursuit of the impossible. And that's why we're members of the premier organization for professional novelists.

I hope everyone has happy holidays and a happy New Year. I hope that as the year ends, you take time to celebrate the highlights and reflect on the—um—not so highlights. I hope you

enter 2024 with whatever goals fit you and with an ongoing passion to entertain readers while making a living doing it.

I look forward to seeing what the next year holds for our organization as Caethes Faron takes the reins. As I say my goodbyes, I say my welcomes to our new President, President-Elect, Treasurer, and Newsletter Editor. Best wishes to everyone.

~ Celeste Barclay

Celeste Barclay, a nom de plume, lives near the Southern California coast with her husband and sons. Before becoming a full-time author, she was a social studies and English teacher. She holds degrees in International Affairs (BA), Secondary Social Science (MAT), and Political Management (MPS). She channels that knowledge into creating rich historical romances that bring the heat.

About NINC

NINC is committed to welcoming a diverse and inclusive membership to our organization and serving all members. No author will ever be discriminated against on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual beliefs if any, ability, nationality or age. It is NINC's desire and goal to make sure that every author member feels welcomed and accepted and heard.

About Nink

Nink's goal is to provide our readers with high-quality articles that offer critical business advice, marketing how-tos, advanced craft coaching, or strategy to continue building a career, all geared to established authors. All members should feel confident that *Nink* provides something for them. We welcome pitches and submissions from all members; [propose an article](#) or submit a [letter to the editor](#).

NINC Member Benefits

Don't forget to sign up for the [email loop](#), [critique/brainstorming group](#), [traditionally published group](#), and the members-only [Facebook group](#) if you haven't already. The [Pro Services Directory](#), member [discount page](#), and [sample letters](#) are also great resources.

Missing a newsletter? Past issues can be found [here](#).

Accessing the NINC Website

Not sure how to log in to the NINC website? Visit the login page here: <https://ninc.com/membership-overview/login-to-ninc/>



Hot Shots

Recently in the headlines

Copyright lawsuit against AI faces predictable headwinds

The copyright lawsuit brought against AI large-language models by Sarah Silverman and others has seen a portion of its claims dismissed by the judge—because the judge doesn’t see how the AI output is similar to the protected work. The judge said the claims may be amended, but the plaintiffs must argue how the AI’s output is “substantially similar to [copyrighted] works.”

This development isn’t surprising, given the throw-everything-at-the-wall-and-see-what-sticks approach of these lawsuits. The biggest and perhaps most important claim—that the copyrighted works were included in the training dataset for AI without permission—still stands. [Learn more.](#)

Book sales update

According to Circana BookScan, print book sales are down 3.5% versus 2022 (as of Nov. 11). The biggest category declines are in juvenile nonfiction and juvenile fiction. The best performing category is adult fiction, which is running flat against 2022.

Announcing the Hot Sheet bestseller list

In partnership with Bookstat, we're thrilled to offer three bestseller lists that showcase what's selling outside of the Big Five publishers

There's less love in the air for bestseller lists these days: *USA Today* [pulled resources](#) from their weekly list, which has affected its composition, and the *Wall Street Journal* just [announced](#) it would no longer run bestseller lists at all. We've still got the *New York Times* bestseller list, of course, but it offers highly curated lists that cater to the NYT audience and don't reflect what's selling in the self-publishing realm.

It's long overdue that someone in the industry celebrates the authors and books selling well that aren't getting much attention from mainstream outlets.

In partnership with Bookstat, we are proud to offer three distinctive monthly bestseller lists, which started with October 2023:

- Top 50 Self-Published Ebooks
- Top 50 Self-Published Print Books (online sales only)
- Top 50 Hidden Gems (print, online sales only)

Bookstat is a paid service that grew out of the once popular Author Earnings reports. (Here's our [coverage](#) of that development from February 2018.) Bookstat's goal is to provide real-time information to publishers about what's selling online. It tracks ebook, audiobook, and print book sales through online retail only. BookScan, by contrast, tracks print book sales through retail channels, whether online or through brick-and-mortar stores; its ebook and audiobook sales tracking relies on publisher reporting.

One thing that makes Bookstat unique is that it incorporates ebook subscription sales into its model in addition to à la carte sales. Overall, Bookstat says it captures 90% of the ebook market and 62% of the print book market. Like no other service today, it can reveal what's happening in the self-publishing market.

More about the logic behind these three lists

The Hidden Gems list excludes Big Five publishers as well as other publishers of significant size (for example, Norton and Scholastic).

Unlike other bestseller list compilers, we at Hot Sheet aim to provide transparency about what you're seeing. While the self-publishing bestseller lists we receive from Bookstat will remain untouched (unless an error creeps through), we have done some light curation of the Hidden Gems list. For October 2023, we've excluded test prep guides (such as those from Kaplan), atlases from Rand McNally, the Bible, and blockbuster cartoon compilations from Andrews McMeel (Calvin & Hobbes). We'll let you know every month what we've excluded or changed in the list methodology.

The Hot Sheet bestseller lists are [free at the Hot Sheet website](#). Anyone can read, share, and enjoy these lists. For subscribers, we'll include a teaser (like what you see below) that shares the top 10 from one of the lists, with links to [view everything at our website](#).

Top 10 Self-Published Ebooks: October 2023

Rank	Title	Author	Release Date
1	Things We Left Behind (Knockemout Book 3)	Lucy Score	Sep. 5, 2023
2	Cruel Promise (Oryolov Bratva Book 2)	Nicole Fox	Sep. 6, 2023
3	Haunting Adeline (Cat and Mouse Duet Book 1)	H.D. Carlton	Aug. 12, 2021
4	The Broken Vows: Zane and Celeste's Story (The Windsors)	Catharina Maura	Sep. 29, 2023
5	Things We Never Got Over (Knockemout Book 1)	Lucy Score	Jan. 13, 2022
6	Cruel Paradise (Oryolov Bratva Book 1)	Nicole Fox	Sep. 6, 2023
7	Twisted Love: A Grumpy Sunshine Romance	Ana Huang	Apr. 29, 2021
8	Things We Hide from the Light (Knockemout Book 2)	Lucy Score	Feb. 21, 2023
9	Obsession Falls: A Small-Town Romance	Claire Kingsley	Oct. 12, 2023
10	King of Greed: A Billionaire Romance (Kings of Sin Book 3)	Ana Huang	Oct. 24, 2023

20Booksto50k: Direct sales and AI take center stage

The 20Books conference will also change hands and undergo a rebrand in the U.S.

By Edwin Moore

The [20Booksto50k conference](#) is one of the premier publishing events focusing on shop talk for self-published authors. The conference aims to empower individuals with the ability to earn a living from their writing, and there is no reticence on anyone's part in discussing their intention to make cold, hard cash from their writing and, ideally, quit their day job.

This year's event was held Nov. 6–10 at the Horseshoe Las Vegas Casino. The event attracted 1,700 attendees, including authors and vendors. As with the earlier 20Books conferences in 2023—in Seville, Spain, and Amsterdam, Netherlands—discussions revolved around two key topics: direct selling and artificial intelligence.

When it comes to direct selling—i.e., extracting yourself from dependency on Amazon—Shopify has emerged as the preferred platform, with print-on-demand fulfillment through Bookvault and ebook and audiobook fulfillment through BookFunnel. Ream has emerged as a preferred platform for subscriptions. (Read our [coverage](#) of Ream's launch earlier this year; also, we covered how one indie author [drives direct sales](#) using Shopify, among other tools.)

Numerous authors also spoke of the benefits of using Kickstarter to fund initial sales and production, especially for those looking to put out a higher quality product. Longtime indie author Joanna Penn said she has never subscribed to the hyper-prolific school of self-publishing and is focused on just two projects a year. Penn said that Kickstarter has helped make this possible and, in 2023, she raised \$45,000 for her book *Writing the Shadow: Turn Your Inner Darkness into Words* and \$31,000 for *Pilgrimage*, a memoir about walking pilgrimages.

Of course, Penn has a significant author platform. When selling direct or raising money on Kickstarter, the importance of having a pre-existing community of readers cannot be understated. The majority of conference speakers discussing the need for writers to go wide were already established authors who are bringing their audience with them when they shift sales platforms. Typically, they already have a direct-marketing apparatus in place, either through email or social media.

Going wide may be less viable for new authors just coming into indie publishing. And those skeptical of the advice to go direct are quick to point out that it's not as if Amazon has stopped selling books. It remains and is likely to remain the far dominant sales channel. To its credit, Amazon appears to have noted the shift in sentiment; the company brought a large team of reps to 20Books and has sent sizable teams to other public-facing book fairs as well, including the just concluded Miami Book Fair.

The shift to direct sales has been prompted, as is well known, by dwindling payments for authors in Kindle Unlimited, while the ecosystem has been further complicated by the seemingly unstoppable proliferation of copycat, plagiarized, and disposable titles. Which brings us to AI, which has turbo-charged the problem of title proliferation and copyright infringement.

Some authors at 20Books, particularly those with a track record of sales and an existing audience, said they were experimenting with using AI to speed up their own production, though few were keen to admit this publicly. The reaction to the use of AI among speakers was polarized. Elizabeth Ann West of the Future Fiction Academy (and a former employee of Sudowrite) offered the most compelling presentation in favor of the topic. She invited users to experiment with the [FFA's prompting tool](#). John Truby, author of *The Anatomy of Story* and other books, was among those opposed to the use of AI, calling it "a deal with the devil" while touting his own plot-outlining software.

One area where AI has broad acceptance, without shame, is audiobook narration. Some authors advocate using AI-generated audiobooks to test the market. Should a book or series prove popular with readers, they then advocate investing in a human audiobook narrator with name recognition who can potentially open up a new audience and extend the book's longevity in the marketplace. Narrators with name recognition drive their own sales.

What's next for 20Books? The 20Books event is organized by Craig Martelle and Michael Anderle of LMBPN Publishing. It was officially announced later that Martelle is stepping down from running 20Books Las Vegas. The event is being taken over by Joe Solari and will be rebranded and relaunched as Author Nation. (Earlier this year, Martelle hosted a high-priced, invite-only indie author Mastermind workshop on the island of Mallorca. One presumes he'll continue with this project. Anderle, of course, is continuing his prolific writing career at the helm of LMPBN Publishing.)

Meanwhile, the 20Books conference brand will continue in Europe; the next event is scheduled for March 2024 in Seville.

Links of interest

Trends

- **Measuring romance based on Goodreads data.** Researchers comment, “What makes romance so unique is that it stands apart as a double-outlier: both much larger and much more modular, much busier internally, than any other major genre of fiction.” [Read J.D. Porter et al. at Public Books.](#)

Amazon

- **Publishers Weekly digs into the FTC suit against Amazon.** Read about Project Nessie, an algorithm that helps Amazon keep prices high because it knows when other online stores will raise prices at the same time Amazon does. [Read Jim Milliot.](#)
- **Amazon stands accused of running irrelevant ads to boost profits.** The FTC and 17 states are suing Amazon for using its power to increase prices and exclude rivals. [Read Lauren Feiner and Annie Palmer at CNBC.](#)

Reprinted and condensed from [The Hot Sheet](#). Jane Friedman has 20 years of experience in the publishing industry, with expertise in business strategy for authors and publishers. She's the co-founder and editor of The Hot Sheet, a paid newsletter for authors, and has previously worked for Writer's Digest and the Virginia Quarterly Review.

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Conference Reports

Newsletter Masterclass

Presented by Erica Ridley

Reported by Cidney Swanson

Erica Ridley is a New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of witty, feel-good historical romance novels. She's become known for the information she imparts in this newsletter masterclass.

In Erica Ridley's view, a list of newsletter subscribers is the strongest asset a writer owns because it provides a direct communication channel from author to readers. For anyone who needs convincing to start or maintain a newsletter, Ridley explained that the point of a newsletter isn't to sell books: it is to create superfans. More fans will be willing to buy an author's catalog if they know and like the author.

Attracting subscribers

There are a variety of reasons readers will join a newsletter. They might have enjoyed a past book or be interested in new releases. They may already know and love an author's work. Or they may be intrigued by a reader magnet (freebie offer) that was advertised.

When readers aren't signing up, it could be caused by one or more of the following: the process is confusing; the sign-up form is annoying, ugly, or illegible; the value is unclear or uninspiring; or the reader simply became distracted by something else on the page.

To attract subscribers, therefore, a sign-up must be obvious, easy, provide value, and appear everywhere possible.

Ridley explained that exit-intent pop-ups (the sign-up boxes that appear when a visitor is about to click off a page) are nearly 10 times more effective than a stationary bar sign-up at the top of a website page. Ridley recommended that pop-ups (or stationary bars) should redirect to a landing page, sometimes called a "squeeze page" or "lead-generation page" with NO external navigation and no flashy or distracting imagery.

A landing page should have a clear headline, clear value proposition, and clear call to action (CTA). It should have no additional links, offers, or actions available to the visitor. This page can be linked to ads, book back matter, vendor bios, and social media bios. As a point of interest, readers are twice as likely to sign up for a newsletter as to follow an author on social media.

In addition to the sign-up placements listed above, there are several other options for obtaining subscribers. These include:

- Group giveaways such as [BookSweeps](#) or [LitRing](#) where you pay an administrator to manage the giveaway and receive a list of opted-in sign-ups at the end;

- Round-robin giveaways where you and 11 other authors in your genre highlight one author for every month of the year;
- Viral giveaways such as [King Sumo](#) or [Rafflecopter](#) where one way to enter the contest is by sharing the contest;
- Surge giveaways such as those [Written Word Media](#) offers;
- Discovery giveaways such as [BookFunnel](#) offers, and
- Facebook Lead Generation where the ad asks, “Where shall we send your free book? Just enter your email below.” (Note that if you upload your current email list to Facebook, you can create a lookalike audience to target, based on your current list.)

Pro tips:

- Offer a free item such as a short story or book in exchange for signing up.
- Refer to the list as a “VIP” list since people like to feel special.
- Don’t request a favor, i.e., “Join my list!”
- Instead, grant a wish: “Here’s your free goodie!”
- Use an evergreen link.
- When utilizing a content-blocking pop-up, allow at least 10 seconds before displaying the pop-up.

Keeping subscribers

Regardless of where email subscribers come from, there are certain best practices to keep them. An author should use a domain email, verify their domain with their email server, and make certain that email provider isn’t on a black list.

To encourage subscribers to stick around, Ridley suggested the following language for a confirmation pop-up: “*Thank you! Your goodies are on their way! Check your email and spam folder, and be sure to add this email to your contacts.*” She further recommended thinking of a thank-you page as a second chance for an up-sell. Word the up-sell as a favor to your reader, with a bonus or two offered, if possible.

Once an author has sign-ups, what should they send? Ridley recommended including the offered reader magnet in the first email. The email must make a great first impression, reminding subscribers of how or why they got the email, and it must set expectations for future emails in terms of frequency and content.

Pro tips:

- To increase deliverability, use the least amount of fancy formatting.
- Create a welcome video or at least an author photo for greater connection.
- When making a bonus offer for a free book, have individual links to each ebook retailer so that you can collect data on where the reader shops and make appropriate coupon or sale offers specific to that retailer.

Subject lines should be attention-grabbing, short and sweet, and, ideally, create urgency and scarcity: “Last chance for the special price!” Ridley suggested doing A/B testing of subject

lines and avoiding all caps, multiple exclamation marks, or emojis that replace words. She recommends mailtester.com, which will test for spamminess.

There are several factors that affect open rates, and you can test for these with variables such as day of week or time of day. The recentness of the last interaction will affect open rates. The age of the list and the size of the list will also affect it. Larger lists will have fewer opens. The value of the content in previous emails will affect whether readers open it. Overactive spam filters can prevent emails arriving. Seasonal events can also affect open rates. Sometimes size matters. It isn't how big the images are, but if there is a ton of code behind the scenes, Gmail will cut it off.

When considering template design, Ridley recommended a maximum width of 600 pixels for optimal mobile display. It is also important to use a clean layout with plenty of white space, to choose a legible font, and to employ consistent branding. Avoid busyness or overwhelming designs. With so many readers using mobile platforms to read email, authors will want to choose providers who offer responsive mobile design. Use minimal links and be sure they are obvious links. Space links carefully for fat-finger syndrome.

Whenever possible, personalize emails. Speak to subscribers as if they are the only person reading the email. Use "you" and not "you all." There are psychological hooks that can encourage action to be taken. FOMO, scarcity, and urgency are useful, but so is using social proof from external sources. An email has three seconds to elicit attention, interest, desire, and action. If readers know, like, and trust the sender, they are far more likely to act.

When readers aren't clicking, it could be caused by ambivalence, concerns, procrastination, or simply overwhelm. To solve for procrastination, create a sense of urgency by using a time deadline. To prevent reader overwhelm, offer only a single suggested action per email. With too many options, readers will be less likely to act on anything. To improve click rates, a CTA should be clear, obvious, and enticing. Don't just tell readers about a new release; say, "Buy now."

Ridley stated that 61% of consumers say they enjoy receiving promotional emails. Thirty-eight percent say they would prefer more frequent emails. Authors should send consistently, whether this is weekly, monthly, or quarterly.

When re-sending to subscribers who didn't open their email, Ridley suggested using a different subject line but cautioned to use this trick sparingly.

Engaging subscribers

So what should an author say in their emails? There is no one "right" way to run a newsletter. However, there are best practices, and Ridley had several recommendations.

When starting out with new subscribers, Ridley advised having an email automation in place to engage readers. A scheduled automation sequence will get the reader used to hearing from an author, teach them that the emails have value (i.e., by offering compelling content), and create a personal connection. Ideally, a recipient feels they're getting a letter from a friend.

Ridley prefers a four-email automation sequence with the following content:

1. A welcome email that delivers the magnet, written on brand for an author's persona.
2. An email that asks the reader if they got the freebie, and offers additional ways to connect.
3. An email that asks where they buy books and whether they listen to audio.
4. An email that invites the reader to join an ARC team.

Ridley also likes to offer discount codes from Kobo, Google Play Books, and Barnes & Noble, who supply these codes. She suggests using an email provider that allows you to track where readers came from, and what offers they click on so that you can send discount codes effectively.

She likes to create one-click reader polls to learn more about their familiarity with her books. She will provide five response options ranging from "never heard of you" to "read everything you've written."

Ridley collects first names, and in case a reader doesn't provide theirs, she will address them with "Dear Superstar" and ask if she got their name right. It's tongue in cheek, of course, but it also encourages subscribers to reply and correct her, and replies increase deliverability.

Pro tips:

- Keep reader magnets book- or series-specific.
- When offering new bonus content, also offer it to existing subscribers.
- Whenever possible, make bonus content exclusive to subscribers.
- Avoid high-value giveaways (ereaders, gift cards) which attract non-readers.
- Compose the back matter offer to be enticing: "What will our heroine do when [fill in the blank with something relevant to your story] happens? Find out here!"

Astound and awe your readers, which leads to profit!

Story is king in email, and a few engaging sentences, or at most a couple of paragraphs, is really all that is required.

Create an avatar of your ideal reader and write as if writing to them, individually, each time. If you are short on time, a single topic and CTA is best. Help yourself out by creating a cut-and-paste cheat sheet or template to use to fill in the blank and remember that done is better than perfect.

Emails can be educational, demonstrate social proof, or provide useful information. You might share interviews of your characters or of similar authors. It's always good to announce what is new or has a new cover. Share photos, research, behind-the-scenes information, or pictures of your desk. If you are a member of another fandom, share your nerdiness; readers will love to hear about it. Remember that you are not your target audience. Just because *you* wouldn't want to read about it, don't make assumptions about your reader, who will almost certainly want to read about it.

Reader engagement is important, so if someone sends you fan art or posts a TikTok about you, share it with gratitude.

Ask questions that are genuine, relevant, open-ended, request opinions, and spread positivity. Responding to emails is a must, if at all possible. This will increase your superfan factor and deliverability.

Readers enjoy participating in an author's process. You can request that subscribers name characters or towns or pick the next trope. Allow them to vote on a setting or a plot point, which will further increase their sense of involvement and community.

When there is a new release coming, create a series of emails. A first email should let subscribers know they will hear from you more often because you're so excited to share with them. The second email can contain a cover reveal. The third email can provide a sneak peek at content. Ridley likes to make an offer to send readers a chapter a day. They indicate their interest by clicking a link. After they do so, they enter an automation where, for 10 days, she sends them a chapter a day. By release day, they are eager to buy the book.

On launch days, authors can maximize the deliverability of their emails by sending stripped-down emails with simple text. Only share one image and provide only the bare minimum of links necessary. A few days later, send a launch week update listing reviews or sharing sales numbers. For authors with an influencers list, all information can be shared on the eve of the new book launch.

Since many retailers' algorithms reward steady sales over several days, it is smart to segment email sends. On day one, traffic will come organically via social media. From day two onward, traffic will decrease. To combat that, on day one, send to low-engagement readers. On day two, send to medium-engagement people. On day three, send to your high-engagement readers. This will provide a steady and growing pulse of sales to algorithms that track such, increasing the likelihood that a release will be more widely recommended by an ebook retailer.

After a launch, send thank-you emails expressing gratitude while also inviting those who didn't buy yet to come and grab the new book. Request reviews and thank readers and any influencers publicly.

To measure success, an author must know their numbers. Ignore the numbers pertaining to other authors. The main metric that matters is conversion, so pay attention to this.

A few of Erica's favorite hacks to improve sales and engagement involve highlighting backlist. She will pick a book and provide her readers with special information about it, such as a bit of backstory on the writing, and then invite them to grab the book and read it. Even with books that have been available (or free) forever, there will always be some subscribers who have never read a given book.

Erica likes to celebrate book anniversaries, even of unpopular books. She doesn't necessarily put them on sale, but she finds that readers will still purchase them. Backlist is capable of bringing in good money. When she has a featured deal with BookBub, she will notify her newsletter subscribers of the sale price two days before BookBub sends their email.

Unsubscribes happen

When subscribers leave, authors can feel troubled or discouraged. What causes readers to unsubscribe? It could be that email content was off-putting or irrelevant. An author with an unengaged list who emails after a hiatus will experience higher unsubscribes. By including too

many high-resolution images or fancy fonts that don't load, an email will encourage unsubscribes. Similarly, a lack of white space or emails that are difficult to read on mobile will result in high unsubscribes. Lastly, readers are there because they want insider info. If an author doesn't provide this, subscribers may leave.

Ridley feels that unsubscribes are not all bad. Why pay for freebie-mongers who are never going to buy? Or for subscribers who never open? Get rid of the dead weight! In the event that they neither unsubscribe nor engage, send a reengagement campaign before dropping readers. Tag those who request to never be deleted.

In a reengagement campaign, identify and tag those who have yet to engage. Send the reengagement email. If they don't re-engage, unsubscribe them.

Last thoughts: how to create reader delight

A reader expects to be informed about new books, but why not go beyond to surprise and delight them? Utilize sales and coupon codes, freebies, bonus content, contests, and giveaways. Recognize birthdays. Ask readers if they want swag. If they do, have them send a SASE and then mail the swag out. Ridley invites readers to provide their street address if they want to enter a drawing for swag. She then sends customized postcard swag using a service like Postable.

Ridley likes to offer a PDF which will allow readers to tick off which books they have read and which remain. She uses language such as, "Are you missing any Erica Ridley books? Download this PDF!"

Ridley's parting advice is to ask only one favor per email and to offer lots of goodies along the way.



Cidney Swanson is a Kirkus Reviews award-winning author of coming-of-age adventures featuring characters you love like family. Or possibly better.

How to Hop Off the Exclusive Hamster Wheel

Presented by Steve Pieper

Reported by Trish Milburn

Steve Pieper, the founder of Author Marketing Mastery through Optimization, works with authors to increase their overall sales. Since 2018, his clients have shown an average increase of \$39,000 in annual sales when selling direct.

Steve Pieper is the founder of the [Author Marketing Mastery through Optimization \(AMMO\)](#) program, which boasts the highest per-capita author earnings of any book marketing program currently available. He also co-developed a conversion rate marketing process backed by \$178 million in client results.

Pieper began the session by admitting the title of the program was a bit misleading. It wasn't, in fact, about exclusive vs. wide in book sales/distribution. He invited those who thought it was going to be about that topic to leave and for those in attendance who had friends not in the room who might be interested in the actual topic to tell them to come in.

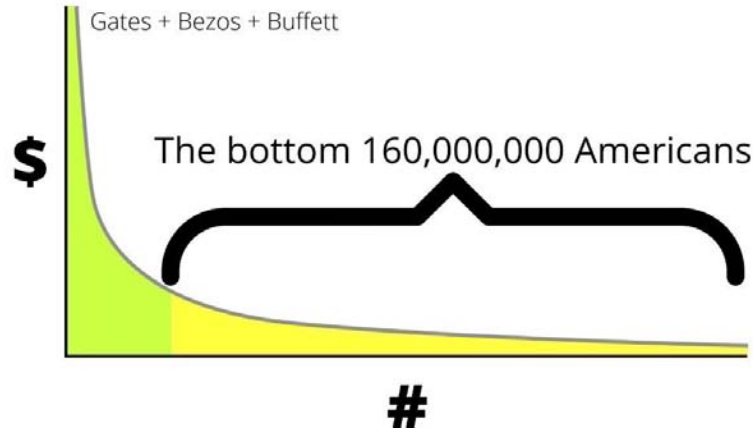
So the actual title of the session? **The Hamster Wheel and the Power Law: How the Obstacle is the Way.** It was a continuation of his Thursday session, The Secret Sauce of Direct Sales.

Early in the presentation, Pieper gave an impressive statistic: There is a \$35 test that is responsible for \$125 million a year in revenue, across all businesses. But before he got to the specifics about that test, he presented the audience with some setup and explanation about why the test works.

Every game has rules, but most entrepreneurs don't understand the most important rule of the business "game." The best way to understand this rule is through examples. Take trees. They produce tens of millions of seeds, but only a handful of those seeds become mature trees. Business obeys the same law as nature—the Power Law Distribution.

Well, that sounds like a term right out of a business school textbook. What does it mean? It describes a quantity whose likelihood of occurring decreases as a power of its size. It's the math behind the Pareto Principle, the 80/20 rule which states: for most outcomes, about 80% of consequences come from about 20% of causes.

The Power Law reveals that most of the results go to a very small percentage of the population. Pieper said that pretty much everything around money obeys the Power Law. For example, the top 1% of earners in the U.S. own more than a third of all U.S. wealth.



The stock valuations of a few companies such as Amazon, GE, Facebook/Meta, GM, and Apple are way higher than most U.S.-based businesses listed on the stock exchanges. Amazon accounted for 6% of total S&P 500 value in 2018. Evenly distributed value would be 0.2% per company, so Amazon is 30 times bigger than the average company.

The same rule applies to authors. JK Rowling is taking a lot more to the bank than the vast majority of authors.

Pieper said, however, that the Power Law is often fractal. For instance, the vast majority of Amazon's value comes from just two lines of business—Amazon Web Services and Prime—out of the hundreds of the company's business experiments. Warren Buffett has bought 400–500 stocks in his career, but most of his wealth comes from just 10 of them.

How is this useful?

Book ideas obey the Power Law. It's the number of ideas we have vs. the quality of those ideas.

- Do readers *love* the idea?
- Do readers *love* it enough to tell their friends about it?

The hard truth is, most of our ideas aren't good enough. Yet, we write those books anyway because we don't know what "good enough" looks like.

Our marketing assets follow the same principle of quality vs. quantity. Will our marketing efforts cause readers to click and buy? Though we also don't know what "good enough" looks like in our marketing, we spend the money anyway. When fewer than 5% of ideas produce results, what are the odds our first guess is correct? Why would we write an entire book on a hunch?

Why not test our ideas first? Most seeds never become flowers, so we must "plant" (*test!*) many seeds. And we must do this quickly and inexpensively.

The Power Law teaches us that the highest scorers are the ones who take the most shots. The NBA player who missed the most shots in history was also the highest-scoring guard in NBA history—Kobe Bryant.

So, yes, authors should write more books, but we should test our ideas first. What should we test?

- Title
- Tagline or hook
- Premise
- Description
- Opening sequences

Test all of these *before* writing the book. The benefit of doing so:

- You won't waste time writing a book that few people have interest in reading.
- If an idea tests well, that should translate into more people buying and reading your books.
- More people will enjoy your books.
- More people will buy more of your books.
- More people will tell their friends about your books.
- So, *even more* people will buy your books.
- And those people will also enjoy your books, and so on.

Word of mouth is always at work, but is it working *for* or *against* you?

Pieper shared a quote from Naval Ravikant, an early investor in companies like Uber and X (formerly Twitter): "Business owners only market because they don't know how to sell. And they only sell because they don't know how to build a product."

"I think he's right," Pieper said.

Exceptional products can build their own momentum over time, but publishing is different—and not in a good way. According to a statistic sourced from Quora, there were 32.8 million books for sale on Amazon in 2014. But the total number of authors earning \$100,000 lifetime by 2018 was only 1,000. And there were 1.7 million new books published in 2018. Add to that 4 million-plus books published annually since 2019. So there are likely between 45 million and 60 million books available on Amazon.

Yeah, it's a little crowded.

Because of these large numbers, there is no scarcity or urgency in publishing—things that make people buy something and buy it now. With potentially 60 million books for sale, there's no scarcity. Since they are always on sale, there's no urgency either. And for a truly depressing statistic Pieper shared, only 0.06% of authors ever sell more than 1,000 books.

Successful authors need all three skills that Ravikant mentioned.

- Exceptional marketing
- Exceptional sales skills
- Exceptional products and experiences

In order to be successful, authors also need enough assets in play to win the Power Law game because one of the key elements of the Power Law is luck. Big winners are both

exceptionally good *and* exceptionally lucky. So authors need to create exceptional experiences, write exceptional books, and sell them using exceptional ads.

But how?

Click testing

Pieper said important click testing can be done via short tests using Facebook ads. For 800-plus businesses in more than 75 industries, \$125 million in extra revenue was earned thanks to this type of testing.

“We use ad fragments as test variants to see how specific elements and ideas resonate with our market,” he said. “Your ideal customers will (unknowingly) vote on the ad configuration(s) that worked best for them.”

The best ideas, images, and combinations get the most clicks at the cheapest cost. For books, Pieper said the ad elements they test are:

- Test 1 – headline
- Test 2 – images
- Test 3 – text
- Test 4 – complete growth ad

Pieper illustrated how to go from your Meta account business manager, then into the ads manager, then into ad campaigns, ad sets, and finally individual ads. He said to start testing with traffic ads, which are 10 times less expensive. Every ad is an experiment, a test variant—an idea to test. When Pieper runs this type of testing, he gives each ad (variant) 400 impressions then stops showing it. You want a click-through rate greater than 2% and a cost per click of less than 25¢. Pieper said that it doesn’t matter where the ad actually takes the clicker. They don’t have to know it has anything to do with you. You’re just collecting click data.

Pieper said his company click-tests ads in a certain way, testing the idea with nothing else around it. They use a color block, which is a pattern interruption that stops Facebook and Instagram users’ scroll. Then the idea that is being tested goes right inside their brain.

An example of this that Pieper showed in his slides was a blue box with only the following white text in it: “Two hearts, one prison sentence.”

A couple more examples:

He fell for her precisely
because she was so mean.

Six corpses and a bomb. It had
been a rough week, even by
my standards.

Testing process

Pieper's testing process is to run a traffic campaign with a budget of \$30–\$50 per day. Each idea (individual ad) is given only 400 impressions before it is turned off, and a total of 10 ideas are tested. Again, you're looking for an idea that results in a link click-through rate of greater than 2% and with a cost-per-click of less than 25¢. Repeat tests with different variants until you find a winner that beats the benchmark.



Trish Milburn is the author of more than 50 titles, including her *Idol in Love* K-pop romance series and the *Jade Valley, Wyoming Western* romance series from Harlequin Heartwarming.

Creating Your Perfect Author Ecosystem

Presented by Russell Nohelty

Reported by Laura Resnick

Russell Nohelty is a bestselling fantasy author, the publisher of Wannabe Press, co-host of the Kickstart Your Book Sales podcast, and co-founder of Writer MBA and The Future of Publishing Mastermind.

Russell Nohelty's company [Writer MBA](#) focuses on teaching authors about sales, marketing, and business principles to help them sell more books. Nohelty has collected data for years from writers he's worked with in that capacity. According to his analysis, 20% of the students surpass expectations, but 20% underperform, and more than 50% "never hit launch at all."

Digging into the data with a goal of understanding why this was happening and whether such results could be predicted, Nohelty found that most people who overperformed shared similar traits with each other. So did those who underperformed. And people who don't launch at all also shared some common traits.

Nohelty said he found five personality archetypes when it comes to marketing and sales tendencies. These archetypes (or author ecosystems) remained the same whether an author was "pre-revenue" or making a seven-figure income. Each archetype has specific tendencies which lend themselves to different types of marketing and to success on different types of platforms.

"This is about what brings you success and doing what you love doing," Nohelty said. If your marketing isn't working for you, "You're not doing marketing wrong; you're doing the wrong marketing."

We are told there is "a way" to succeed, but it doesn't work well for the majority (60%) of people. The standard modality taught by the publishing industry only works for a minority percentage. No author's business works the exact same way as any other author's business.

Successful authors build their own "stack" (process, system) by embracing and evolving their own natural tendencies. Understanding author ecosystems helps you grow your business based on your own natural tendencies.

These are the five author ecosystems which Nohelty described.

Desert

Superpower: Optimization

Motto: "I see the code behind the matrix."

These writers are experts at understanding the pulse of the industry. Deserts can readily write a book that hits all market tropes. Deserts recognize the current zeitgeist of the industry, the big-picture tropes, and they write for it. They think that *is* the way to write a book—how

else would you do it? And they hit all the right beats. They naturally move in concert with the market.

They're a great fit with Kindle Unlimited, webstores, and advertising. Their work often lends itself to going viral.

Deserts make great cowriters, ghostwriters, and journalists. They may have multiple pen names, and they move easily between subgenres.

Deserts typically have difficulty turning casual readers into superfans—but a Desert might not even be interested in that. They're usually not into building or maintaining a reader community. They also struggle with platforms that require long-term commitment to find success.

Grassland

Superpower: Depth

Motto: "I'll write my way out."

Grasslands are experts at content marketing, finding *one* topic that is theirs and works incredibly well for them, whether it's cowboy romance, or George R.R. Martin's world of Westeros and its inhabitants, or a million nonfiction articles about a specific topic that funnels people to that author.

Grasslands can write long series with incredible depth that nobody can match—a signature series. They can find trends one or two years out and steer the industry toward them. They can also weave trends into what *they* do, embroidering them around the edges of *their* topic or world, bending those trends to *their* series subject matter.

They're also skilled at using a lot of hooks to bring people into their writing worlds at different points. Every book is a new hook; every content article is a new hook.

Grasslands are a great fit with Medium, Substack, fiction apps, and wide retailers.

However, they can have difficulty actually launching something because they're always doing more research. They struggle with "shiny object syndrome." And they don't like asking people to buy their work.

Note: Deserts and Grasslands are almost always right about trends.

Tundra

Superpower: Excitement

Motto: "How can I get every person here really excited?"

Tundras are "trope-stacking heroes." A Tundra's book may have 500 tropes.

They're also promo-stacking champions (Nohelty cited Skye Warren as an example), generating sales, sales, and *more* sales by promoting multiple different aspects of one project. Tundra books are often #1 in Kindle stores. If there's a game to play, a Tundra will win it or die trying.

Tundras push all their energy into a short peak, a short timeframe, a concentrated effort.

Scarcity is their best friend; they're very good at having a short launch window. They work best in short, highly energetic bursts, then they need to hibernate for a while to recover and plan. Without recovery time, they'll burn out.

They're a good fit with Kickstarter, landing pages, conventions, and Kindle Unlimited.

Tundras burn through subscribers faster than any other type of ecosystem, so they need a lot of audience-building time. They also need to think more about how to make money between launches.

Forest

Superpower: Interconnectivity

Motto: "These are my people."

Once you read one of a Forest's books, you will (assuming you liked it) read everything they write, no matter how weird or how far the project is from your usual choices. Nohelty described a Forest as a "universal fantasy champion," a writer who gives the reader a consistent "brand experience" across all genres and subgenres. This is because a Forest focuses on theme over genre; a Forest has a message to get out and will do it in every genre they write in. Their readers follow them across pen names because they deliver the same experience across all their work.

A Forest does well with Patreon, Ream, wide retailers, live events, and Kickstarter.

Nohelty said Forests attract superfans who really, really like their brand promise, and they should double down on that. One example he suggested is including inside jokes in your work, things that superfans will recognize and appreciate. If you're a Forest, "your readers have a stake in you and your work."

A Forest often misjudges trends because their reader community isn't "plugged in." Their careers can also take longer to get started because they move between genres. A Forest usually needs to think more about ways to attract new fans.

Aquatic

Superpower: Vision

Motto: "What if we just made a movie and a game and a commercial and..."

An Aquatic is format agnostic; they like to explore different formats for their material: "I need to do a podcast, a film, a graphic novel." An Aquatic is in service to a particular universe rather than a particular format. For example, the *Star Trek* universe is a bunch of movies, TV shows, books, merchandising, cartoons, and games.

You need that *one hook* of the universe for this to make sense. From there, the Aquatic says, "It's easier to go where the fans already are." The more different types of formats in your universe, the more committed you make your superfans (Nohelty says Aquatics have the most loyal superfans), and you become the brand manager of your multi-format universe.

Aquatics have natural aptitude for Kickstarter, Patreon, Ream, live events, and wide retailers.

However, finding your audience across multiple formats is expensive and exhausting. You don't always have the money needed for launching additional formats. And you need to have enough people interested in your universe to justify the time, effort, and expense of expanding it to multiple formats.

Evolving beyond your own ecosystem

Nohelty says the first step in growth is to make your own ecosystem healthy and stabilize it. Focus on the things that are right for your natural tendencies and where you thrive, and set aside things you're doing that are the wrong focus for you or where you lack any real focus. Once you're thriving within your ecosystem, the next step is to bring in the pieces of other ecosystems that work for you. Your natural ecosystem is still the basis of all you do, but successful authors evolve once they cap out the growth of their own ecosystem.

Evolution doesn't mean abandoning your base ecosystem; it helps you supercharge your ecosystem with the superpowers of other ecosystems. Take what makes you stronger, and let the rest of it go.

Most ecosystems (Forest, Aquatic, Grassland) should probably first evolve into a Tundra (a "sales funnel"), because you need more money and/or more fans. Deserts should evolve into Grasslands or Aquatics, and Tundras should evolve into Grasslands or Forests ("flywheels," keep readers in your ecosystem).

According to Nohelty, there are relatively few Aquatics or Tundras in publishing. NINC, he said, has a high proportion of Grasslands.

The publishing industry's big perpetual mistake is telling all ecosystems that *one* thing works for all types of writers and you should all be doing the *same* thing.

But actually, to give an easy example, Deserts and Forests should *not* have the same strategy for pen names. Deserts should write under multiple pen names, because they deliver different brand experiences depending on genre and trend. Whereas a Forest should release every book they write under just *one* pen name, because they deliver the same brand experience in every book.

All your strategies should take into account which archetype you are, rather than following the one-size-fits-all advice that typically permeates the publishing world.

And never forget—you can hire people! Find people who are good at things you're not good at or hate doing, and pay *them* to do it. Or work with other writers in different ecosystems and use each other's skills.

Finally, remember that an evolved ecosystem always needs a "sales funnel" to bring people into your ecosystem, and a "flywheel"—a way of keeping readers happy in your ecosystem over time, whether you're currently selling something or not. You want them to be happy to be part of this community, so they don't get bored and leave.



Longtime Novelists, Inc. member Laura Resnick is currently NINC's central coordinator.

Kindle Delivery Costs, Demystified

Presented by Brad West

Reported by Nancy Robards Thompson

Brad West is a co-creator of Vellum software. Formerly a senior software developer at Pixar Animation Studios, he has been active in indie publishing for more than a decade.

What do you know about Kindle delivery costs?

It's something that affects most indie authors publishing on Amazon. According to West, it's a cost of doing business that few authors understand. He has made it his business to demystify it.

Authors publishing with Amazon have a choice of 35% or 70% royalty rates. If you choose the 70% rate, Amazon charges you a delivery fee of \$0.15 per MB, which is calculated using the size of the epub file that Amazon converts. The delivery fee is subtracted from your royalties. From the start West emphasized, "It's not the size of the file you upload. The fee is based on the file size after conversion."

You may be wondering: What is this converted file? What affects its size?

More on that in a moment.

First, who is Brad West and how does he know about delivery costs?

While West has never worked for Amazon and he readily admits that he has not been behind the scenes when the Amazon powers-that-be have discussed royalties and delivery fees, he has done extensive research on what drives up delivery costs. His research has also helped him develop some practical tips to help authors keep delivery costs down.

Before West shared his tips, he presented a brief history of ereaders and the technology that powers these devices.

Some history

"The mobi format was introduced in the year 2000," said West. "While mobi has always been associated with Amazon, it was not invented by Amazon. It was invented by a French company called Mobipocket, which was eventually acquired by Amazon in 2005."

Mobi was used to power the first Kindles, which were introduced in 2007. In the seven years before mobi was used on the Kindle, it was used on devices like the PalmPilot personal digital assistant.

Fast forward to 2007 when Amazon launched the first Kindle, which sold for about \$400. Things changed significantly for the publishing industry.

"While the original Kindle didn't win any industrial design awards, Amazon made a big deal about Kindles making it possible for readers to have 200 books with them at all times

thanks to its 250 MB of storage (which is about 50 times smaller than any Kindle you can buy today)," said West. "The first Kindles did not have Wi-Fi capability. Instead, it relied on something Amazon called Whispernet. Whispernet made each Kindle like a little cell phone that communicated through data rather than Wi-Fi. That meant every single Kindle had a data plan, but the people who purchased the original Kindles were not paying for a data plan. Amazon paid for them. They figured that between the nearly \$400 purchase price and the fact that the data would be used by readers to purchase more books it would all wash out evenly. When a reader purchased a book, they would receive something called AZW. AZW was basically mobi wrapped in copyright."

West went on to explain that ebook technology has a lot in common with web technology.

"To put it into context," he said, "it helps to think about where technology was at that time [2000–2007]."

CSS is the language for describing the presentation of web pages, including colors, layout, and fonts. It allows one to adapt the presentation to different types of devices, such as large screens, small screens, or printers.

Web page technology of the early 2000s supported colors and some images, but it only allowed for a handful of fonts until the year 2009 when the Web Open Font Format (WOFF) was developed and added to the W3C open web standard. This development paved the way for widespread adoption of web fonts.

"So when the first Kindle was launched," West said, "fonts other than Helvetica and Times just didn't exist in the world of ebooks."

Converted files

Back to mobi. "This converted file was designed for these old Kindles," West said. "The files needed to be smaller because the older Kindle had only 250 megs of storage and Amazon really wanted to hold true to their promise that readers could fit 200 books onto a Kindle. Plus, Amazon was essentially paying for delivery of these books because they were paying for the "cell phone" data used by all these Kindles. At that time there was a true cost to deliver books to these older Kindles."

Even though today's ebooks are delivered to readers' Kindles via Wi-Fi and Amazon is no longer paying for the old Kindles' "data plans," the company still charges authors a delivery fee for each book.

Book formatting software such as Vellum, which West and his business partner, Brad Andalman, created and launched in 2013, can help indie authors create ebooks with decorative features like drop caps, ornaments, and special fonts—books that are beautiful, but also don't break the budget with added costs like Kindle delivery fees.

"As excited as our early clients were to be using [Vellum], it wasn't long before we started getting questions about the new functions," West said. "They were worried that these new font features would make the files they were sending to KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing) too large and it would totally ruin their profit."

West went on to explain that publishing a beautiful book doesn't have to adversely affect your bottom line.

“If you are selling your books through Amazon KDP and receiving a 70% royalty rate, you’re actually receiving 70% of the book’s sale price minus the delivery fee, which is \$0.15 per megabyte. When we talk to people, not everyone knows this. It’s important to know that \$.15 per megabyte is not calculated on the epub file you upload. It’s based on what Amazon refers to as *file size after conversion*. The file size is calculated by Amazon after you upload your epub file to KDP. Amazon processes and converts the file. The \$0.15 (U.S. dollars) per megabyte is based on the size of this file.”

What is this converted file and what affects its size? What makes it bigger and what can you do to make it smaller?

“This is something we’ve been researching for 10 years,” West said. “We have been taking apart files, uploading them to KDP, figuring out how they work, and why things don’t work. We have devoted a great deal of time to learning about the history of KDP. All that work and research is what gives us the information.”

Does this make sense?

“It does cost something to put a file on a server and to send it to someone over the internet,” said West. “Amazon provides that service [Amazon Web Service or AWS]. If you want to make use of [Amazon Web Service], Amazon will offer it to you for \$0.09 per gigabyte, but if you don’t have that service and Amazon sends out your book it costs \$.15 per megabyte. That’s about a 1600x markup.

“Amazon converted files are still designed for old Kindles even though there aren’t many of them out there anymore. To work with the older devices, a converted file is not going to have fonts. Because fonts didn’t exist when the mobi format was developed and the Kindle was first introduced.

“Because Amazon’s conversion system is still designed to deliver to these older devices, there was no such thing as CSS at that time. CSS came after mobi format was developed. That means there is no font support, but you could actually include images. As you know, images can take up a lot of space. When your book includes images, Amazon is actually going to do some work to make them as small as possible, in the interest of keeping this converted file as small as possible.”

What does this all mean for our converted file and delivery costs?

Let’s look at some numbers

“As interesting as that history might be, the only way to figure out delivery fees is to upload your file to KDP,” West said. “That’s what we’ve been doing for years and that’s what I have done for the [following] examples.

“I’m going to start with an 80,000-word book formatted in Vellum. When I hit the generate button in Vellum, it gives me an epub file that is about .2 MB. Can you use this information to determine file size or delivery cost? No. You need to upload the file we formatted in Vellum to KDP to know the size of this converted file. In this case that’s going to be .39 MB and my delivery fee is going to be \$0.06.

“Compare the epub file we created in Vellum and the converted file. A lot of times when you upload a file the file Amazon converts will be smaller because Amazon tries to make it as small as possible. But in this case it’s larger. Why is that? I uploaded an epub file without a cover file. I did it this way, because it made for easier comparisons later on. If you don’t know, when you upload to KDP, you can either include your cover or not. Either way, Amazon is going to take out the cover and add whatever cover you upload separately. But in this case, I uploaded this epub file without a cover. Then I uploaded my cover file separately. Amazon pulled those two together and combined them and gave me this converted file size. In this case, it’s a little larger because it combined the two.”

How does book length affect delivery fees?

West uploaded two book files for comparison—one file was 80,000 words and another file that was 160,000 words. If you compare the size of the epub files, the larger book is just about twice as large (0.41 MB) as the shorter one (0.21).

“When I uploaded these books to KDP and Amazon converted them (80,000 words = 0.39 MB, 160,000 words = 0.65 MB), the larger one is not quite twice as large because some of that is the cover so that means my delivery fee for the longer book is going to go up from \$.06 cents to \$.10.”

West said that he hoped authors would not think that he was suggesting that they shorten their books because the length of the book really doesn’t make a big difference.

“Of course, if you are writing longer books the delivery fee will be more expensive than shorter books, especially if you are combining books, like building a boxset and selling it as one ebook. The delivery cost will go up. We see author bundles, or anthologies, with maybe 10 or 20 authors contributing. Those files are huge and it does affect the delivery fee. That is something that you want to consider when you’re pricing a very long book or boxset.”

Let’s talk about fonts

“In my history lesson, I talked about how fonts weren’t really around when these file formats were created,” West said. “Will fonts affect your delivery fee? I’m going to test this with two books. The first one is created with Vellum’s Meridian style; that’s our default style. Vellum doesn’t actually embed any fonts. All the fonts that it refers to, such as Palatino, it expects it to be on the ereader.

“The second book was formatted using Vellum’s Edgewood style. It uses a font called Cinzel that is not on most ereaders. In fact, it uses a few different versions of it, because there are versions without the flourishes. When you’re building an ebook and you want to have a font displayed that is not on ereader devices, what you have to do is actually embed the font in the ebook, which means there is a copy of the entire font within the ebook. The question is if we’re doing that, how does that affect the delivery fee?”

West tested the two books mentioned above: the simple style without embedded fonts, and the one with embedded fonts.

“If we look at the epub file for the version with the embedded fonts, it is more than three times the size (0.66 MB) of the simple style (0.21). The larger size comes from the fonts that

Vellum needs to embed in the epub file for those fonts to work. Any designing program that offers custom fonts is going to have to do the same thing. Fine. Do we care about the size of this epub file before delivery costs? No, we don't. What we care about is the size of the converted file (after Amazon converts them, both files are 0.39 MB). The delivery fees are exactly the same (both are \$0.06). Fonts do not affect your delivery fee."

What about CSS?

CSS stands for Cascading Style Sheets. CSS describes how HTML elements are displayed on screen and other media.

"The general idea of CSS is how we do layouts of web pages and ebooks. How we say that chapter headings should have a certain space, whether or not it should be centered, or if there's a drop cap, etc. CSS doesn't take up a lot of space. It's a modern way to do a design. Vellum has a feature called "Text Conversations" where you can format text to look like text messages that are on your phone. When we introduced it, we got a great response, but we did get a lot of questions, such as how does this design element affect delivery cost?"

West tested the "Text Conversations" feature using the simple style that he used in the previous example. He created two different epub files. He left one file in the simple style (0.21 MB) and he added the "Text Conversations" CSS format to several conversations in the other file (0.21 MB). The size of both the epub and the converted files with the added CSS embellishment did not change (0.39 MB), proving that CSS does not increase delivery fees, which was \$0.06 for both.

Let's compare different programs

West acknowledged that not everyone uses Vellum.

"I wanted to convey information to people who don't use Vellum," he said. "We see claims from competitors that say they're going to give you a better delivery fee. I tested Vellum, Atticus, Calibre, Draft2Digital's free converter, Reedsy's free writing app, and Word."

DIFFERENT PROGRAMS?			
	EPUB Size (MB)	Converted (MB)	Delivery Fee
Vellum	0.21	0.39	\$0.06
Atticus	0.25	0.39	\$0.06
Calibre	0.23	0.41	\$0.06
D2D	0.22	0.41	\$0.06
Reedsy	1.50	0.38	\$0.06
Word		0.43	\$0.06

“Let’s look at the epub size of all of these,” West said. “You will see that most of these are the same, but Reedsy’s is larger. For all of these, I picked the default style. Different programs have different options for the default style. Reedsy’s default style includes a ton of fonts. That’s why that one is larger. Remember, we just learned, though, that fonts will not affect the delivery cost.

“Let’s look at the converted files. These numbers are not exactly the same, but they are pretty close and notably, even though Reedsy’s file was larger, its converted file is pretty much the same. All of the programs are close enough that their delivery fee is exactly the same. So switching from one program to another is probably not going to change your delivery fee. The converted files are pretty much the same.

“If there’s anything to take from this, the biggest (converted) file is Word. Word did not have an epub file. So I just uploaded the Word file straight to Amazon and Amazon went on to convert it. Interestingly, that method produced the largest (converted) file. However, if you are writing larger books or putting together boxsets, and you are using Word, it’s worth considering a formatting program. In the end, you may reduce your delivery costs. We have received some feedback from authors who have come to Vellum from Word. They have said that their delivery fees did go down.”

What about images?

We know that fonts don’t make a difference. CSS doesn’t make a difference. Various programs don’t make a difference because epub files get converted by Amazon. But what about images?

West tested this question by comparing two files: one with a photo on a book’s *About the Author* page and the same file without a photo.

“When the photo is added the epub file gets larger,” West said. “The epub file with the photo weighs in at 0.80 MB. The epub file without the photo is 0.66 MB. The converted file with the photo is 0.49 MB. The converted file without the photo is 0.39 MB. The delivery fee for the converted file is larger, but by only one cent. If you’re only using one photo in your book, it may not make a difference, but if you are thinking of adding several photos throughout the text, cost is something to consider.”

West took the photo experiment a step farther by comparing three different versions of an epub file: one with text only, one with text and the author photo, and one that included text, the author photo, and three high-resolution book covers featured on the author’s *Also By* page. Going from no photos to four photos, the epub file size more than doubles (text only: 0.66 MB; text plus the author photo: 0.80 MB; text and the author photo, plus three high-resolution book covers: 1.30 MB). After Amazon converted the files, the results for the file with author photo and three cover photos was more than twice the size of the converted file with no photos (text only: 0.39 MB; text plus the author photo: 0.49 MB; text and the author photo, plus three high-resolution book covers: 0.79 MB). Also, the delivery fee for the file with author photo and three cover photos was twice the cost of the file with text only (\$.06 to \$.12 by just adding four photos).

For comparison, West ran the file with the text and four photos through other publishing programs. All the delivery fees were about the same.

IMAGES			
	EPUB Size (MB)	Converted (MB)	Delivery Fee
Vellum	1.30	0.79	\$0.12
Atticus	13.8	0.86	\$0.13
D2D	0.67	0.84	\$0.13
Reedsy	14.6	0.86	\$0.13

Vellum image sizing

“Vellum was slightly less because it has the ability to size down a high-resolution file that is only being used as a thumbnail,” he said. “Vellum offers an image-sizing feature that can condense photo file size and, in turn, decrease the cost of the delivery fee by about half. For example, if the high-resolution delivery fee is \$0.12 (the file without photos is \$.06), the image-sizing function can decrease the size of the files, bringing the cost down from \$.12 to \$.09. If the files are thumbnail size, you will not see a difference in the quality of the photo.”

Since images increase the delivery cost by about 50% (when compared to text-only files), you may decide it's not worth this extra cost to include photos in your ebooks. Something to consider is saving the images for print editions rather than ebooks. For the Also by the Author section of your books, consider inserting links to other books in the series, which will take readers to the Amazon buy page rather than including the covers.

Conclusion

When considering delivery fees, keep in mind:

- The length of the book
- Images in the book—make sure the images are not larger than they need to be

Don't worry about:

- Embedded fonts (they don't cost you a dime)
- CSS — for special effects, such as re-creating text messages and including drop caps
- Text formatting

Remember:

- Kindle delivery costs are calculated on the royalty amount you choose and the converted file size.

[Here is a link](#) to the slides that West used during his presentation.



USA Today bestselling author [Nancy Robards Thompson](#) has a degree in journalism. She worked as a newspaper reporter until she realized reporting “just the facts” was boring. Happier to report to her muse, Nancy has written more than 50 women’s fiction, romance, and cozy mystery novels.

Why Wide (and How to Thrive)

Presented by Erin Wright

Reported by Ines Johnson

Erin Wright is a full-time author and co-founder of the Wide for the Win Facebook group.

Erin Wright was sick the night before and had just been released from the hospital at the time of this workshop. So, she decided to not have a presentation and turned the workshop into an Ask Me Anything.

She co-founded the Wide for the Win Facebook group in 2019 with Suzie O'Connell. The group steadily grew and has now reached 16,000 authors. They have since started a Circle group, which is free to join. Circle is another social media platform. The Facebook group is for wide-curious authors, while the Circle group is for wide-committed authors. Please note that Wright is no longer an admin for the Wide for the Win Facebook group.

The biggest difference that people experience wrapping their minds around wide is that the wide platforms reward history and longevity while Amazon has the 60-day cliff. For example, with preorders you get a boost on the day the reader orders and the day the book goes live. So, it's as if the author gets rewarded twice.

Going back and forth between wide and KU hurts you on the wide platform because every time you pull them from the wide platforms it wipes the slate clean and you set the clock back to zero, hurting your momentum. Meanwhile, every time you pull out of Amazon, you get rewarded. So, you're rewarded on Amazon and punished wide, leaving you making nothing on the wide platforms.

Q&A

If you have books that have been in KU that you're pulling out to take wide, can you put them on preorder for the other sites to get the boost?

You cannot have the books in KU and on the wide platform simultaneously, even in preorder. Wright recommends that if you have a longer series, you can live release the first two and then do preorders. Put up all the preorders at the same time, staggered to release once a month until they all go live. There are new release sections or merchandizing on all the wide platforms. You get rewarded when the book accumulates a lot of reviews.

Because the wide platforms are smaller, you can dominate with fewer sales than on Amazon. It will take patience for the algorithm to see the sales across an entire pen name. So, if one of your books gets a major promo, like a BookBub Featured Deal, then the other books in your category surface and get featured more. Apple, Barnes & Noble, and Kobo have live human beings saying yes or no to merchandizing opportunities. Google's merchandizing is run by bots. Amazon's answer to merchandizing is the AMS ads.

Can you speak to how you handle Facebook ads? Do you do individual ads for each platform?

Wright has never run a Facebook ad in her life. Audience member Bridget Baker mentioned that she sends her main link to Amazon and puts the links to the other platforms in the copy of her ads. Baker does not limit her interests with the platform keyword like Amazon, Kindle, or Nook, etc.

What advice do you have for someone who was wide and went to KU and wants to go back wide?

There has been more interest in people going wide with the page read payout going down and the rise of direct sales. After you check to make sure all of the backmatter of your books, covers, and blurbs are checked for correctness and up to date, then go and cross-promote with other wide authors in your subgenre. Google Play is an excellent place to find other authors in your genre because they have an extensive list of also-boughts on your book. Apple Books also has extensive also-boughts. Nook also-boughts aren't nearly as extensive. Wright also recommends doing giveaways with gift cards only to the other platforms and not just Amazon. If you have a winner that is international, you could give away free ebooks via BookFunnel.

What is the best technique(s) to promote your book wide? What are the options you find most effective?

Use a paid newsletter that will allow you to do at least two links, one of which isn't Amazon. Written Word Media does wide links. You could do cross-promotions with other authors like round-robins. Wright wants to do a permafrees bundle of NINC authors who write steamy small town.

Wright believes in permafrees for the win. She's found that permafrees really move the needle. Apple rewards free books. Kobo and Google Play, not so much. Google Play has a promotions tab, where you can set books free. Promote these through paid newsletters, cross-promotions, and BookFunnel promos.

Do you recommend going through an aggregator like Draft2Digital or direct to the platform?

When you use an aggregator, you will lose out in metadata. Wright warned that you cannot use D2D to get to Google Play. If you live in the U.S., you should be able to go direct to Barnes & Noble. You want to go there so that you can have access to the promotion platform as well as to gain access to their unique categories like "Unforeseen and Unlikely in Love" promotions access. Kobo does in-house promotions, but you can also get them through D2D. With regards to Apple, Wright goes through D2D because their backend platform is not ideal. With regard to libraries, you will have to go through an aggregator because you cannot go direct to OverDrive.

Should you go to OverDrive using both Kobo and D2D?

With Kobo, you don't pay the additional 10% royalty split because of the deal Kobo has with OverDrive. Do not upload to both. Choose one or the other because you will have a double listing. If you started with one and you want to switch, do not move the previously published book to the other.

Please talk about how the metadata on Google Play helps?

Google Play is a search engine, so there are things there that are intricate. The most important thing to know is they will search index the fields to create search results for readers like title, subtitle, series name, author name. The fifth field that is not search indexed is the blurb on any platform, except Google Play and Apple Books. For subtitle you need something useful like short, succinct keywords such as “an enemies-to-lovers western romance.” It has the trope and the genre in it. If you put this kind of subtitle into your title, you’ll show up higher in Google Play only. You can also put the word “Free” into your title section. Also put “free” in the blurb because it’s search indexed.

How many books should you have before you do permafrees?

Wright recommends having two books out and the third on preorder before going the permafrees route for book one. This is per book, not per pen name. Follow BookBub’s rules—you can promote once every month per pen name and once every six months per book title. Wright aims for one large promo per month and smaller ones sprinkled throughout that month. There’s a long list of promotions in the Wide for the Win group in the pinned posts.

How long do you keep a book permafrees?

Watch the organic visibility you’re getting along with how well the newsletter swaps and paid newsletter downloads are going. Once performance starts to wane, it might be time to swap them out.

With regard to paid newsletters, don’t use the same one more than once every six months. Look at cost per download by taking the cost of the promotion and dividing it by how many downloads you got. Then compare that number across other newsletter promotions. Because you could have an expensive promotion do a lot of downloads and a smaller newsletter do a little bit, but the CPD could be better on the smaller newsletter list.



Lover of fairytales, folklore, and mythology, [Ines Johnson](#) spends her days reimagining the stories of old in a modern world. She writes books where damsels cause the distress, princesses wield swords, and moms save the world.

Writing Serialized Stories with Kindle Vella and Help Your Books Stand Out with Amazon Ads

Presented by Ashwina Upreti and Amanda Hedger

Reported by Trish Milburn

Amazon executive Amanda Hedger supports KDP authors across all genres and levels of ads expertise. Ashwina Upreti works with Kindle Vella.

As you might gather by the name of this session, it was split into two parts with each half giving an overview of these two programs that exist under the Amazon umbrella.

Kindle Vella

First up was Ashwina Upreti, a software development manager with [Kindle Vella](#), who is also a writer on the platform. Vella offers stories in a serialized, episodic format in easily digestible quick reads.

“It’s reading on the go, a habit that readers incorporate into their day,” Upreti said.

Vella offers a mobile-first reading experience. You can also read on computers but not on ereaders. Upreti said the sweet spot for episode length is between 1,500 and 2,000 words, but it’s up to the author what makes sense for the story. There’s a low barrier to entry, and authors may also upload as frequently as they like. She noted that readers like the frequent touch points with authors and their stories. It’s a part of their daily lives.

The first three episodes are free to readers. These freebies are used to hook the reader, making them willing to buy tokens to unlock and read new episodes. The cost of these episodes depends on their length.

There are several ways in which Vella authors can interact with their readers. They can write in the Author Notes area about topics such as what inspired them to write the story. Readers can leave comments about the story, and authors may respond as much or as little as they like. Polls can be utilized to ask readers questions.

Readers, in turn, interact by leaving comments, “faving” their favorite stories, and giving the ol’ thumbs-up, which can be a serotonin hit for the author. Push notifications are sent to readers to let them know when new episodes are available, but Upreti said that often readers will check even before they get those notifications.

As for what an author can earn publishing on Kindle Vella, the answer is 50% of the cost of each token—which, again, varies based on episode length. Bonuses are also available and are distributed based on a wide array of factors such as reads, publishing cadence, engagement, etc.

You retain the rights to your stories and can leave the episodic version up on Vella even if you publish the full book on Amazon after you're finished with all the episodes. There is, however, a 30-day waiting period between the publishing of the final Vella episode and the publishing of the full book.

"It's a great place to experiment with your writing," Upreti said. "You can try new genres, find new readers, can schedule episodes ahead of time for a buffer, or write as you go."

She said that Vella is currently looking for literally every kind of story.

About Amazon ads

After Upreti's portion of the program, the presentation turned to a spotlight on Amazon ads given by Amanda Hedger, a senior account executive who has been with the company for 10 years. Hedger covered four areas in her presentation:

1. Starting with readers
2. An overview of Amazon ads
3. How to get ready to advertise
4. Basics of creating your first Sponsored Ads campaign.

"The customer journey isn't linear anymore," Hedger said. "Readers are discovering authors/books in new ways."

Thirty percent of readers who visit Amazon do so to research what to read.

Authors should ask themselves these questions before starting any Amazon ads:

1. What are you advertising and why?
2. Who are your customers? (Fans? Someone new?)
3. What is your budget? (You can adjust this at any time.)
4. When should you start advertising?
5. How long can you advertise? Amazon recommends evergreen ads that keep running, but you can start with an ad that runs four to six weeks.
6. What result do you need to achieve?

Benefits of Amazon ads

1. Precise targeting by keywords or products
2. Completely self service
3. You control your budget and bids.
4. Clear reporting with a dashboard of metrics where you can see in real time how your ads are doing.

Sponsored ads overview

Sponsored Product ads are great for promoting new or older titles, a single book or more. With auto-targeting, the creative lift is light. They pull information about your book through from Amazon listings.

Sponsored Brand ads are for a cost-per-click solution. They help maximize author recognition and can include up to three titles in the same campaign and have high visibility.

Self-service lockscreen ads build recognition for authors.

Amazon also offers display advertising both on and off Amazon, priced per impression with exclusive insights and shopping signals.

Requirements for using Amazon ads

1. Have a KDP account
2. Book available on Bookshelf
3. Book available in country in which it's advertised
4. Have valid payment method on file
5. Campaigns must meet creative requirements.

If you're new to advertising, Hedger said to start with Sponsored Product ads and to advertise within your budget averaged over a calendar month. You can change this at any time. Amazon will let you know if you're running out of budget.

Amazon determines which ads to show to shoppers based on their queries. Relevance and bid price are both considered when making this determination. If you have the best bid but the relevance to what the shopper is looking for isn't high, then you may not win the bid. Winning bids work on a second-priced system, meaning you don't pay the amount you actually bid but rather one cent more than the next highest bid.

There are three types of bids that are best for different situations. Dynamic Bids Down Only are good for new campaigns. Dynamic Bids Up and Down can help you get rid of excess inventory or be used for high-performing titles. Fixed Bids are for driving impressions.

Targeting also falls into three types:

1. Automatic (keywords close match, loose match)
2. Manual (broad, phrase, exact match types)
3. Negative (excluding certain keywords)

In product targeting, you can target specific ASINs.

Hedger said you can set up manual targeting after running a couple of weeks of automatic targeting campaigns, based on the information you learn during that automatic campaign. You can leave the auto campaign running since it will continue to learn and provide you with additional information.

You can even advertise foreign-language books, and you don't need a new log-in for each country.

No questions were taken during either of the presentations. Instead, attendees were encouraged to visit with Upreti and Hedger during Amazon's office hours during the conference.



Trish Milburn is the author of more than 50 titles, including her indie published Idol in Love series of K-pop romances and the Jade Valley, Wyoming series of Western romances for Harlequin Heartwarming.

Audiobook Marketing: Reaching More Listeners

Presented by Stephanie Beard and Kate Runde

Reported by Laura Resnick

Stephanie Beard serves as a director of acquisitions for Podium Audio and has spent the past decade working in acquisitions, rights, and the adaptation market. Kate Runde leads the acquisitions team at Podium, discovering and developing the content of trendsetting storytellers.

Podium Audio is a leading audio publisher (recently ranked 2,365 on the [Inc. 5000 annual list](#) of the fastest-growing private companies in America) which is currently expanding into ebooks and print formats. Speakers Kate Runde and Stephanie Beard emphasized that the company takes pride in discovering, developing, and amplifying the work of talented authors. Podium first gained widespread attention when it turned author Andy Weir's *The Martian* into a tremendously successful audiobook.

The speakers said that audio is still the fastest growing section of the book industry, currently exceeding sales revenue of \$100 million per year. Bottom line: Your book should be available in audio format.

Podium, which currently has more than 5,000 titles on its list, works with more than 1,300 authors and 775 narrators. Its catalogue is mostly frontlist because it is a new company. It's the fourth largest publisher of science fiction/fantasy audio, which puts it ahead of most of the major publishing houses. Podium is also the sixth largest audio publisher of romance, which is the fastest-growing genre in audio format.

The speakers described Podium as an independent publisher with an indie perspective, thriving in today's disruptive market with no need for validation from traditional gatekeepers. They also repeatedly emphasized the company's commitment to serving and partnering with authors, including reporting sales accurately and paying royalties on time.

Podium emphasizes high-quality production values and skilled narrators. They strive to pair books with the best and most suitable narrator for the material, as well as ensuring that the author has a voice in this process. The company also has partnerships with special narrators that allow them to collaborate on marketing initiatives.

In terms of distribution, Podium partners exclusively with Audible to maximize author revenue. The speakers said Podium enjoys financial and marketing benefits at Audible that can't be beat by other retailers. For example, Podium titles get preferred placement when Audible has sales, especially for Audible-exclusive content. Pre-order options at Audible help push sales and visibility, and the promo for this can start months before release. "Our strategy is more effective for day-one sales," the speakers said.

Podium was among the first to be invited to participate in Audible Plus, an all-you-can-listen program. They've found great success for titles enrolled there, as well as opportunities to promote backlist titles. Through various sales and promotions on Audible, including Daily Deals, "dozens of our authors reach top 10 in store."

Runde and Beard emphasized Podium's deep knowledge of the book and adjacent media market, "which makes us a helpful ally in your career." In addition to "full marketing support for all of our audio products," including animated covers that authors can use for promotions, they do author spotlights, narrator spotlights, social media marketing, genre-focused newsletters, merchandise, live events, promo videos, paid media, and advertising. Podium invests heavily in paid ads and marketing, putting effort into creative ads and testing their efficacy.

Audio is mostly what they do, but they now have an all-formats publishing program, with expert services in copy editing, proofing, cover art, distribution, cover copy, optimizing metadata and keywords, etc. In 2023, Podium is releasing 100 all-formats titles.

Q&A

What's the best platform for marketing audio?

It's genre-dependent. Facebook has been good for sf/f, as well as Reddit and Royal Road. We try to work with the author and go where their fans are.

Have you done much with audio drama or sound effects?

No, most audiobook narrators prefer single narrators or dual narration. In fact, dual narration is frequent: 60%–70% of our romance releases have dual narration. It's not one size fits all for casting. We like to collect detailed notes about narrators to bring to our casting team, who have a combined 40 years of narration casting experience.

I was exclusive with ACX audiobooks, but now I'm not, because royalties are so whittled down. Can I have my narrator work with you guys?

We prefer to start with a new series. But if you have a relationship with a narrator, we're interested in finding out who that is. We keep close tabs on our narrators, and they must be reliable.

Are you interested in acquiring backlist?

It depends. We track sales before we consider backlist. There are authors here today who have fandoms, and we've bought their backlist. We never say "never," but we're less interested in backlist that's no longer selling.

What is your preferred method of being contacted by new authors?

You can use the [submissions tab](#) on our website, which we check every day. Or people can email us directly. And we meet people at conferences.

Do you have any pet projects?

I love our nonfiction program, a lot of things people are interested in: how to deal with custody during a divorce or with parents going into care. Those subjects also have a high SEO capability. Our job is serving audiences. In fiction, my pet genres are horror, thrillers, and police procedurals.

What about TikTok?

Our TikTok is more romance-leaning than anything; it's mostly a younger, female audience. The romance reader is getting younger and younger, they love it. We do fun campaigns that go viral. We work with some influencers known in the romance community. We do book-by-book campaigns. That area is growing quickly. We've just hired another TikTok person.

How does Audible Plus work?

We were one of the first publishers invited to participate. We added 300 titles in the first round. There was some trepidation; it was a two-year commitment. We found that for authors with series, it was an incredible boon to their sales, but harder for stand-alone titles. Audible Plus is a series driver. You get your first taste for free, then fans use premium credits to buy the rest of the series. We don't do it right away for frontlist titles, which we want to sell at premium price. We select carefully who we enter into the program. It's great for discoverability, great for series, and great for an author's other IP (which we don't necessarily even publish).



Longtime Novelists, Inc. member Laura Resnick is currently NINC's central coordinator.

How to Write Unputdownable Stories

Presented by Alessandra Torre

Reported by Lisa Verge Higgins

Alessandra Torre is the New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of 30 novels of romance and suspense.

Alessandra Torre began the session by telling a story. At the church camp of her childhood, the campers gathered at 9 a.m. to listen to a speaker. She often nodded off during the talk, as did others. But when the speaker took notice of all the snoozers and daydreamers, he would stop mid-speech and announce, “Listen, are you listening?”

It was like a knock on the head, bringing her back to the room, the talk, and the moment.

Stories are like that. Every once in a while, you have to knock on your readers’ heads to make sure they are paying attention to your narrative. In this session, Torre covered four elements of an addictive story that can be used to keep your readers engaged with your narrative.

Element #1: Suspense

Suspense is the fuel in your book’s engine. It’ll keep the reader and the plot moving forward. Suspense doesn’t necessarily mean someone creeping through a dark hallway with a knife. Suspense means raising questions in the reader’s mind without immediately answering those questions. Those questions can be big (“Can they find a happily-ever-after?”) as well as small (“Who’s that knocking at my door in the middle of the night?”). In order to get the answer to those questions, a reader must keep reading.

For suspense novels, the kinds of questions that may be raised include:

- What happened to the missing girl?
- Who killed her?
- Who is leaving threatening notes?
- Who is following her?
- Why is she being stalked?
- What lies are being told to the police?
- Who are the potential suspects?

Some non-suspense examples:

- Why do these characters hate each other?
- Why is she moving to a new town?
- Why do people seem to hate this couple?
- Why is the character ignoring her mother’s calls?
- What happened in this character’s past for her to be so cruel?

Element #2: Tight Writing

- Tight writing means:
- Each scene in the story should have a purpose.
 - If a scene doesn't have an interesting moment, do you really need it?
 - Consider jumping to the most important part of the scene and starting there.
- Remove any "fluff" in the narrative.
 - Avoid long-winded backstories, info dumps, or superfluous details.
 - Note that some genres need more world-building than others and require longer descriptions.
- Vary the length of your scenes.
 - Some scenes are "potato chip" scenes, short and impactful.
 - Other scenes are "pizza" scenes and offer a longer, more layered narrative.
 - Big scenes (often climax scenes) are entire feasts. You may only have a few of these in an entire book (one or two).
 - Mix up the sequence of scenes for maximum impact, such as using a series of "potato chip" scenes and then a "feast" scene.
 - Short chapters are often tight chapters. She aims for 500 to 2,500 words.
- Write vivid scenes.
 - Avoid generic settings. For the events you want to relate, what is the most interesting setting you can use?
 - Select the most evocative details to describe the setting. Whatever is unique, unusual, or striking.
 - Strive to raise questions in the reader's mind by pointing out what "doesn't quite make sense" in the setting or characters. Point out something that contrasts or goes against expectation.

Element #3: Hops and cliffs

An important step in writing an unputdownable novel is to remove any "stop" points in your narrative. "Stop" points occur when some conflict, mystery, or question in the story is resolved to satisfaction, and there's a bit of breathing space before the next thing happens.

To prevent the reader from putting the book down to make dinner, use "hops" and "cliffs." Hops are plotline jumps or time jumps. Cliffs are cliffhangers. In scenes where questions have been answered satisfactorily, you may want to add a last-line cliffhanger, and then "hop" to a scene from another subplot in the book to avoid a "stop" point.

Having multiple subplots in your novel makes this technique easier to use. Torre gave as an example a novel with three storylines: a young woman dying; a significant event in the woman's past unfolding that the reader wants to know about; and a reporter who is trying to get to the truth of that event. When the story of the young woman dying gets grim, the author might "hop" to a funnier, lighter plotline, such as the early moments of the past event. This would give the reader a mental break from the grimness as well as keep them engaged by wanting to know how all the plotlines ultimately intersect.

In using hops and cliffs, Torre suggests:

- Use at least two per book.
- Switch between them at cliffhanger moments, like “There’s a bomb in the building!”
- Don’t use false cliffhangers, otherwise readers will feel cheated.
- Don’t create whiplash by hopping too much. The reader needs to be invested in each storyline, so she tries to spend 3,000–5,000 words on each point of view before switching.
- For romance novels, sometimes she’ll do 90% of the story from the female point of view but will put in short 300- to 500-word scenes from the hero’s POV just to keep the reader interested.
- Similarly, in a book with primarily one POV, she may weave in a small sideplot, such as snippets of neighbors gossiping about terrible things the heroine did years ago, until that gossip melds with the forward plotline and the story blows up.

Element #4: Hooks, twists, and turns

A *great hook*, the first technique in this category, will fully immerse the reader in the story and show off all of its best parts. Note that a hook isn’t just a first line, it’s the entire first scene. Here’s a wish list for a great first-chapter hook:

- The hook (for the whole book) happens early, typically in the first scene.
- It has some pep, energy, interest, and urgency.
- It introduces two or three questions.
- It introduces a unique and distinct voice.
- It introduces a vivid setting or world.

A good example is the opening scene of *The Social Network*. That 10-minute scene sets up everything about Mark Zuckerberg’s motivation and boils down the entire premise of the movie, including foreshadowing, into a single scene.

Good examples for first-line hooks include:

- “I was their prisoner for 32 days before they accepted me as one of their own.”
- “There was no reason for my mother to hate me, but in the South reasons are as flaky as our biscuits.”
- “I decided to kill him on the morning of our 16th wedding anniversary.”

Torre emphasized that it’s important not to set a false hook in the first scene, such as a dream sequence or a false cliffhanger. As an example, she mentioned the *Goosebumps* series, where, at the end of every scene, it was guaranteed a giant monster hand would grab the protagonist, but in the next scene, the reader would learn that the hand belonged to a friend.

A *story turn*, the second technique in this category, is another way to keep your readers engaged. This is an unexpected shift in the narrative and the best example of saying, “Listen, are you listening?” to the reader.

A story turn can be a change in tone, mood, location, point of view, timeframe, or pacing. The easiest way to create a story turn is to take a detour. If the book is going in a certain direction, at some point the reader will develop expectations as to how the plot is going to

unfold. If a couple argues in a scene, the expectation is that they will break up by the end of it. Ask yourself, is there a way for me to take a detour? Is there a way to take the plot in a totally different direction?

Torre offered an example: The scene starts at a kid's birthday party, the cake is eaten, and the presents are about to be opened. The birthday girl opens the biggest box, only to find a dead animal. (Now the reader is paying attention!) The parents are alarmed, the girl is crying, and no one can determine who brought the present. Then the wife takes the box with the dead animal out to the trash and starts to smile.

If your intent was to write a book about a diabolical mother with an ulterior motive, this may be an interesting way to start it.

A *plot twist*, the third technique in this category, is a reveal that completely changes the story.

Plot twists have to make sense, so they have to be set up in the chapters prior to the reveal in a subtle way. You must plant clues without ruining the surprise. Only after reading the plot twist will readers think back and take note of the subtle clues that led up to that twist. For examples of stories with great plot twists, Torre suggests *Gone Girl*, *Fight Club*, and *The Sixth Sense*.

For writing plot twists, you should:

- Write the narrative you want the reader to believe. You need to create a fake story for the reader and build that fake story with misdirection and carefully selected scenarios.
- Hide what the story is actually about in the same way as above.
- Your book is about how these two things interact.
- Plot twists aren't necessary in every book, but they're key for thrillers, mysteries, and suspense.

At the end of the session, Torre summarized the major points necessary for writing an unputdownable book:

- Suspense is the key to creating the need to continue reading.
- Foster that need with impactful and interesting scenes that continue to raise questions.
- Make sure the first scene hooks the reader and that you will deliver on the hook.
- Keep the reader guessing with twists and turns.



Lisa Verge Higgins is a critically acclaimed author of uplifting women's fiction. Her alter ego, *Lisa Ann Verge*, writes award-winning historical and contemporary adventure romance.

Unlock the Potential of Wide Publishing with PublishDrive

Presented by Danica Favorite

Reported by Janis Susan May

Danica Favorite is community manager of PublishDrive as well as a multi-published author of 27 romances who once wrote for Harlequin, an author coach, and former community manager of Harlequin.

[PublishDrive](#) is an all-in-one global publishing platform which can save time and expand reach for self-publishing authors and publishers alike. The process is simplified to where one click lets you publish everywhere in ebook, print, and audio to all your chosen markets. You can publish multiple titles with their bulk-import function and can use AI for metadata improvement. PublishDrive also offers promo tools to boost sales, gives you sales analytics at a glance, and royalty management.

PublishDrive was specifically designed for those authors who have multiple books in KU and are thinking about going wide, for those authors who are currently published wide but want to upgrade their business with optimizing cost and reach, and for those who are just looking to expand their business.

“Why should authors want to go wide?” Danica Favorite asked. The main answer is expanded distribution. Although PublishDrive does distribute through many outlets including Amazon, it uses Amazon’s different ecosystem for comparison. Using Amazon’s exclusivity, while fine for some, has some drawbacks. It allows for only one income stream. According to Favorite, your KDP account can be terminated at any time for any reason with no recourse. It can be difficult to get any kind of support. Worst of all, Amazon is available in only a few countries. PublishDrive is currently available in many outlets in over 216 countries and is expanding constantly.

Publishing wide gives the author access to multiple stores worldwide, meaning you have a greater reach and can retain a larger portion of your earnings, as many of the stores offer a greater share of each sale to the author. Your readers have the freedom to choose the store that works best for them.

Where Amazon will offer as low as 35% on some sales, other stores, libraries, and business models will offer 65% and more. You get to choose the diversification of stores on the basis of business models, formats, and geographic location, including subscription, library, episodic, regional and/or local stores. PublishDrive can access almost all potential outlets, even those typically closed to individual authors or small publishers. PublishDrive can also optimize the time and effort dedicated to administrative duties like uploading books, managing discounts,

monitoring sales, overseeing royalties, and even understanding and unlocking promotion opportunities.

Favorite was quick to point out that while Amazon dominates in the U.S., it doesn't hold the same strength in international markets, which are experiencing the fastest growth of all markets. U.S. book sales are 44% of the PublishDrive market. International book sales are 56%. At the moment, Singapore, Mexico, and the Philippines are showing the greatest growth. Obviously not all of these countries speak English and translations are expensive, but books sold in English command over 72% of the market. Many countries want books in English to improve their command of the language.

Amazon doesn't reach all these countries; PublishDrive currently has 400+ stores in 200+ countries and 240,000 libraries. There is a complete list on their website. Additionally, PublishDrive has just established a doorway into selling in China and signed a contract with a POD store in India.

If you want to update back matter or change the price, you don't have to change in each store individually; just put it in your PublishDrive dashboard and it will change automatically. There are other benefits: a free book converter; bulk import; and tracking tools for your business, including insights on earnings per store, earnings per country, and a filter for custom data. On your dashboard you will find promo opportunities with Apple, Kobo, Bibliotheca, Hoopla, Written Word, Findaway Voices, 24Symbols, Baker & Taylor, Dreame, OverDrive, and others for which you can apply, though acceptance is not guaranteed. And there are other perks—for example, if you are selected for a promo with Written Word through PublishDrive, you don't pay for it.

PublishDrive has a convenient subscription pricing model. Instead of charging a set commission per book sold—which can add up to a pretty penny—PublishDrive offers several programs starting as low as \$14.99 per month, the cost depending on how many books you publish. If you go the commission-per-sale route and sell 25,000, the store gets \$7,500 and you get \$15,000. A monthly subscription for \$100 would mean that you get everything PublishDrive receives except that \$100 subscription. On a per-book basis, the more books you have the less you pay per book. Complete and open pricing is available on their website. Plans can be adjusted up or down according to your number of books and, if you want to enter more books than are available in their website list, talk to customer service and they will work with you to create a plan for what you need.

Another special tool is ABACUS. For \$2.99 a month, it will keep track of and split payments among different authors, as in a group anthology. Only one author in the anthology has to be a PublishDrive member to access this service.

An official publisher partner of Scribd and Dreame, PublishDrive is trusted not just by authors but corporations as well. It is accepted by Apple as an Apple Approved Aggregator and accelerated by Google. The CEO was nominated for Forbes' 30 Under 30 and by Digital Book World as Tech Entrepreneur of the Year.

Favorite says the market is moving in the direction of getting more independent and wide authors, with international sales surging and more business models appearing. She also cautioned that wide publishing sometimes takes a while to succeed, so as authors we need to set

our expectations to reality. Using a partner such as PublishDrive will save time and administrative costs, leaving us more time to write.

PublishDrive even offers a 14-day free trial. Just sign up on PublishDrive.com and start the trial; upload your ebook, print book, or audiobook, then hit the publish button and enjoy the ride. You can track the sales, use the promo tools... then enjoy all the time you've saved.

If you decide to join, you get 50% off your first two months' subscription fee on any of their plans. You can auto-renew or choose a specific time of termination. The end of the contract depends on how you set up your account. Of course, customer service will be glad to help if you have any questions.

If you have any questions of Danica Favorite, she can be reached at Danica@publishdrive.com.



Janis Susan May/Janis Patterson is a seventh-generation Texan and a third-generation wordsmith who writes in mystery, romance, and horror. Janis and her husband live in Texas with an assortment of rescued furbabies.

Pontificating Past Presidents

Presented by Tawdra Kandle, Barbara Keiler,
Lou Aronica, Wayne Stinnett, and Patricia McLinn

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

This presentation featured five past presidents of NINC. As this was a continuous flow of discussion including audience participation, after the first reference, initials will be used. Audience members will be identified by name whenever possible.

Patricia McLinn (PM): I think we're at an inflection point. Direct selling is coming at the same time as the introduction of AI. The conversations we're having remind me vividly of the fall of 2010, when I was trying to upload my first indie book on retailers. We were struggling to work it out. We're again learning a new language about direct sales. This is part of a continuum. Some of us have different trad experiences—mine was pretty abysmal. We were very confused by trad publishers about connections to readers, all funneled through the publisher, then the big jump in 2010 when we could sell on the retailers, and now direct selling is another step. We're closer to having almost a one-on-one connection with readers. Shopify is still there. Craftspeople are complaining about Etsy constraining them, trying to contain them, trying to control the information flow and siphon off more money. This is in addition to other auxiliary service people trying to make more money off us in our business. We must be flexible, watch what's going on, watch the horizon.

Barbara Keiler (BK): Everything Pat says is brilliant. My observations have been that we're all like the blind men and the elephant. I have noticed that my own career is very different from what I did five years ago. I was trad published for many years, then indie, now back to trad in a very different context and genre. Wow, careers can really zig in that direction, as a friend says. Many people are looking to zig. They're tired, burnt out on all the marketing and business demands on indie authors, looking for ways to keep writing, restore joy in writing, focus on writing.

Publishers are looking to monetize what we do, make more money off us; it's in their genetic code—but companies can step in and unload some of the stressful aspects of publishing so we can return to the art and craft, the reason we all became writers. Who couldn't not be writers? If you can not write and stay sane, then go pursue another career. Most of us become writers because we can't help ourselves. Voices in our heads are screaming at us.

For this particular zig—I hope I don't have any more, or I'll need an upgrade—I'm finding new joy in writing because I spend less creative energy on non-writing aspects. I'm hearing

voices saying, “How can we get rid of some of the pressures and burdens of the business side?” Lou [Aronica] is my publisher.

Tawdra Kandle (TK): What BK said resonates. At the Uncon, one of my roommates said, “Was it just me, or did most people say, ‘I can’t write, I don’t want to write, or I’m finding it very difficult to think about writing?’” She was not wrong. Some said, “I haven’t written, I haven’t released.” That signaled to me something I wasn’t surprised about. It can be changed. When the conference team starts planning, we can get ideas about what to talk about. A few years ago, the talk was all about audio and translations. Early on in the planning phase for this year, we realized it would be about two buzzwords: direct selling and AI. We got good info on both so far. But the undercurrent is, how is this going to help us live better, write better, create better, and create more steadily?

From my point of view, where I watch all retailers and industry guests, I’d say that we’re going to look back at this conference and say, “We were in these changes.”

Wayne Stinnett (WS): I started publishing indie 10 years ago. I agree with McPat and Tawdra about the big buzzwords and I’ve been saying it for two years: direct sales. If you don’t have your store set up, you’re behind the curve. It’s the most important connection with the reader. You can’t have it as trad or indie so well as you can with direct sales. You have their email, you have their name, you can talk to them, you can offer new books, offer the next book at a discount. You can’t do that at any retailer or trad. Why should an audiobook be \$20, especially when it’s been out for five years? Having that control with readers is going to be the big thing in 2024.

Lou Aronica (LA): I think really serious readers will be able to tell real authored books from AI. I have two kids in the AI business, my daughter and my son-in-law. My daughter thinks AI won’t catch up soon. My son-in-law says it’ll come sooner. We have time to teach readers how to catch on.

BK: Writers are going to triumph because they pay attention to craft and voice. AI is a very bland voice. Those who survive offer a distinct vision and a distinct voice.

PM: Direct sales feed into that. It’s about an individual. Person to person.

LA: How do I do what I do best better than I’ve ever done before? That’s how authors will separate their work from machine work.

WS: I tell everyone we can’t be competitors. It takes us so long to create what we create, and such a short time for it to be consumed, we can’t possibly be competitors. I don’t look on AI as a competitor. There’s a lot of time between my releases. Fine.

PM: AI can be used for discoverability; it can provide discoverability in ways we can't imagine now.

WS: I think it's got its place, it's just not creative.

TK: Maybe it's a mirror. During [Nicholas Erik's session on AI for Authors] it struck me that you put something into AI and it gives you different angles (on your idea). It can mirror our books in ways that allow us to see them more clearly.

PM: Tawdra, you said so many people aren't writing. As several of you have heard, I've had one hell of a year. My family's all okay, but I've had cascading and sequential infrastructure and tech stuff. One after another, two or three, fix one and four show up, bananas. I've noticed in the past three to four months that writing feels like a break now.

Know what else I learned? I was watching YouTube panels, about three guys who were involved in training military personnel to withstand interrogation. One guy was a Brit who has consulted with celebrities; he analyzed the Amber Heard/Johnny Depp trial and wondered, why do you believe them or not? One guy said, "Part of your brain—the RSV? I'm probably wrong—it's in the back of your brain, when you pay attention, you've told it to pay attention. If you say, "I'm stressed," it makes you more stressed. I need to be with calm.

BK: That's why I returned to trad. So much of that part of my brain was focused on business aspects of writing, it kept taking over more and more of my brain. I thought of it as my Muse saying, "I'm joining the writers' strike right now." I do think when we focus on the business side, it can be the monster that ate Pittsburgh. The business side is creative, it requires lots of energy just like writing, it requires lots of thought just like writing. I'd like to think we have infinite supplies of all this stuff, but speaking for myself I don't. Backing away from all that freed up that part of my brain to focus on the writing itself.

We've had other tumultuous changes introduced to our industry. Next month is the 40th anniversary of my first release. There have always been threats and upheavals. We somehow have to say, "But wait, the writing is the most important thing." I'll say again, some people at NINC are invigorated and excited by the business side. They know how to do it. I don't.

WS: I write first thing in the morning. To get my head out of that, I do business. I come from a business background, construction. That's fun, that's enjoyable to me.

PM: I've been surprised. It's easier for my mind to go to business than to writing. It's back to when I started at writing, where I'm sneaking in a half hour at work and it's fun! It's escape! I'm not having to deal with this wretched stuff. The words come faster.

WS: When I was truck driving, I always had my laptop next to me—you never know when you'll be in a traffic jam.

PM: I've been in traffic with you.

<laughter>

BK: We need people like Wayne so we can hire them. I wish I wrote action adventure on the ocean sometimes, so I could join your company. I'm a Jimmy Buffet fan but I can't write that stuff. With my indie books I wished I could find someone who was attuned to what I was doing and I could just dump it all on them. I signed my books over to someone who thought he could do wonderful things with them. I've earned [zero] with him. But we need people who are invigorated and energized by that work. Maybe NINC can have a subgroup where our own members can advertise, they want to take on more. Wayne has turned this into a flourishing business.

WS: I would say "struggling, but it's fun." You help others. I like to do it.

BK: A lot of us who flounder at it could pay them to do it.

TK: I don't see why people couldn't do that. You're looking for that service.

LA: We have the firepower. If we link up to other organizations, we could do that.

BK: As I said, the less energy you have to focus on making your writing sing, the greater the threat from AI.

WS: What legitimized what I do more than anything else was when I heard from a reader who became a friend, a retired Marine sergeant. He had a high-powered rifle in his hands, he was ready to kill something. He [was reading one of my books and] had one chapter left. He said, "I had to climb down out of the tree because my vision was foggy." I made this guy cry. That's a compliment. AI can't do that.

BK: Some deer is very grateful.

<laughter>

LA: This is about teaching a machine to think like a human being. Can it be done?

WS: You see it on the news all the time, these self-driving cars that drive into wet concrete, or come to a stop because they can't figure out what to do.

LA: The threat is satisfying people with military standards.

BK: If enough of that stuff floods the market, it may turn readers off to reading in general.

PM: Yeah, but TV is going to be AI too.

BK: They'll find some other form of entertainment.

PM: I see a lot of energy, not so much in this group, but on Facebook, from people who are upset. They're gonna STOP AI. I keep thinking, "How often has that worked?" But if there's that energy, put it into considering how we can have guardrails. I don't have any answers. But that's how we should be thinking about it.

WS: Amazon has asked about that.

PM: Amazon has AI in the back, I don't know what for.

WS: Discovery, marketing.

PM: We need a rotating committee to watch Amazon's terms of service. See what they slip in.

TK: Someone will catch it. What concerns me is we have things that divide our community—are you trad or indie, KU or wide? I'm happy that pro-AI and anti-AI writers haven't split the industry. Those who are militantly anti-AI don't realize that they're already using it. I say we are creators and AI is a creation.

Audience: Anything AI generated cannot be copyrighted, as far as I know. Is that correct?

TK: That could be why Amazon is asking.

PM: I wouldn't be surprised if Amazon is collecting this information and waiting for these lawsuits to sort out. What is the legal edge—close to the line but not over it—that they can exploit?

WS: "AI assisted" means "You write the book, you use Vellum to format it." We all do that. I use Microsoft Word. For AI-generated fiction or nonfiction, all they do is combine snippets from all these different sources. They can't copyright it, because it's already been copyrighted.

LA: We were issuing a new edition of an old book. We used AI to look for a quote and got fantastic quotes. That person said that? Wow. But then we checked every quote. Every single one was fabricated [by AI].

Audience: Some lawyers have cited cases that AI had made up.

WS: My wife insists Elon Musk is computer generated.

PM: Lou, did it give you a combination of what you wanted, or what it thought you wanted? Why did it do that?

LA: I don't know.

PM: After this panel last year, people said they wanted solutions and answers. Hah! So do we. So if anybody's got any?

Moderator: We might be able to ask on Ninclink if there are members who will do services for other members. We're not allowed to self-promote our own books. But here [at the conference], if you're a speaker, you're allowed to share the links for your business. Maybe it's for the advisory council [to discuss and decide].

WS: Incoming NINC president-elect David Berens is a great writer but a fantastic cover artist. He does covers for half our tropical artists. Would be good if he could mention that to members.

Audience: BK, about feeling burnt out, when you look at digital strategies, do they make you feel worse because there are too many options, or do you find it invigorating to have more options?

PM: Both.

BK: I don't want to have to learn something new. I want fewer options. I feel like sticking my head in the sand, "La-la-la, I don't want to know." The tech on my indie books is five years out of date.

• **Thanks to our sponsors!****PM:** She can la-la-la for a long time.

BK: Lately, McPat says, I just don't wanna. I can spend my life learning this whole new strategy or I can spend what's left of my life writing the beautiful books I want to write. I've reached an age when a lot of my friends are retired already.

PM: And doing all these fun things.

BK: And my husband says, "Come play with me." But if I weren't writing, I wouldn't be getting the joy from it.

PM: How about JOMO—Joy Of Missing Out.

TK: I'm always interested in hearing anything that will help me improve my business. I love the business side. One part of my brain is the writing part, and the business side is another side. Each is a relief for the other.

I'm impressed with Book Brush for their hourly concepts. The option to offload some of this stuff is great.

PM: Wayne, do you want more business options?

WS: I want more.

Audience: Lou, do you ask your authors if they use AI?

LA: Absolutely. My company has a "no AI" position.

TK: In 2036 we'll all be AI versions of ourselves up here.

LA: Actors are being uploaded to AI.



Jennifer Stevenson writes funny stuff, often with lots of sex. Find her on [Facebook](#) or at [Book View Café](#).

The Path Back to Joy

Presented by Sarra Cannon

Reported by Tanya Agler

Sarra Cannon is the bestselling indie author of more than 25 Young Adult contemporary fantasy novels. She is the host of the successful YouTube channel, [Heart Breathings](#), where she focuses on productivity and building positive momentum.

Who here used to dream of being a writer? This is the question [Sarra Cannon](#) asked to begin this session. The majority of the audience raised their hands. Cannon explained that everyone in the room was a writer. Then she asked the audience to close their eyes. Cannon asked what your past author self would say to your present self. Would you have said what you haven't done? Or would you have mentioned the cool stuff? The important thing is you're an author. You made it.

What is stealing your joy? While there are sources of joy in the industry, including an incredible community, fan admiration, and/or uplifting moments, there are aspects we didn't dream about in the past. For some writers, the answer might be pressure to go faster or keep up a rate that isn't sustainable. For others, it's a lack of control over many aspects of the industry. Other common responses include compromising our true desires; living in fear or increased anxiety; not seeing the desired result of your investment; or isolation or feeling a lack of support. For Cannon, making comparisons is one of her problem areas. Comparison issues can lead to a sense that you're never good enough. This leads to pressure which saps our joy. Overwork or not even being able to write is another joy stealer.

Tasks = Time + Energy. The equation for tasks includes the terms of time and energy. Cannon listed some common tasks as marketing and creating Amazon ads. Cannon said the more successful we want to be, the more tasks we feel we have to do. And the more tasks on our plates, the more time and energy we need to complete them. There is a gap, though, between tasks and success. We have to think about what we do.

Time is finite. Energy is variable. Potential tasks are infinite. There is no more time to be found. When we put tasks on our plate, we forget about life possibilities, including illness and personal issues. The more on our plate, the more our energy goes down and then we feel negative momentum. At times like this, we become less effective.

The Overstuffed Suitcase. The tasks equation is such an important concept. Cannon compared it to a packed suitcase. When we pack more and more stuff to the point where the suitcase won't close, there's no room for joy in there.

Unintentional Sacrifices. This creates a toxic cycle of self-betrayal, self-loathing, stress, and worst of all, unintentional sacrifices. These sacrifices can be your physical health, your mental health, relationships, feelings of safety, lifelong dreams, personal values, and confidence. And, of course, joy. So many of us get into this because we're selling our hearts, love, hard work.

What used to be fun about writing? How much fun are you still having? Cannon said these are important questions to ask yourself as joy is often conditional on external instances.

How can authors reclaim their joy? Cannon suggested 10 ways to reclaim your joy.

Romanticize your writing

What do you love about the process of writing that feels indulgent? Cannon believes it can be delicious to sit down to write. She suggested setting the mood and tone for your writing session. Take off the weight of disappointments. Ways to set the mood can include the tools you use, music, where you write, a new story just for you, candles or a cozy atmosphere, tea in a fancy teacup, or wearing a certain cozy outfit. For Cannon, she loves colored pens and Hello Kitty figurines.

Go back to what made you love it

Think of the book or television show that made you want to write. For Cannon, she remembers reading as a child and getting lost in the world of the characters. She also watched *Veronica Mars*. Indulge in what you love. Read that childhood book again or a book similar to it. Ideas can come out of that. If you connect with joy, that might provide you with your next bestseller.

Redecorate your writing space

Cannon suggested making your exterior environment a mirror of your interior environment. For Cannon, a messy office amplifies feelings of not being enough. She gave herself permission to redecorate her dedicated office writing space with Hello Kitty figures and a colorful keyboard.

Do you enjoy your writing space? How does it make you feel? Are there any changes that would make it feel more joyful to sit down every day? You don't have to spend money to make an inviting and happy space.

Cannon suggests setting up a caddy or a work station if you don't have a room to dedicate to an office. Cannon also suggests cleaning the space as each tiny piece adds up to a glimmer of joy that eventually becomes hope.

Add more joyful non-work into your life

When was the last time you took a true non-working vacation? When was the last time you did that without feeling guilty about it? Writers deserve a day or weekend off. When we don't take time off, we cannot replenish our energy, which is one part of the tasks equation. When was the last time you talked to a friend about things outside of your work? Or did something fun for yourself like roller skating or dancing? When was the last time you volunteered in your community?

Cannon suggested making a list of fun hobbies and scheduling them in your calendar at least once a month. Think of ways to see your writing friends. Think of ways to not feel guilty about taking time for yourself.

Perform a digital detox or digital declutter

A digital detox involves stepping away from the internet or online world entirely for a stretch of time. It can be 24 hours, a week, or even a month. Cannon suggested setting your own boundaries before you start and make a plan. She recommended a blog post, “After the 30-Day Social Media Ban: What Surprised Me and What I’m Changing” by Roni Loren. In her post, Loren discussed how the social media ban was harder than she expected.

Cannon shared that she went through the slides the night before the presentation. It took her three hours because she went to social media and started scrolling. Cannon said that if social media is stealing your joy, a digital detox might help you. Five possible benefits from a digital detox include an improved ability to focus, more restful sleep, decreased anxiety and stress, an increased connection with in-person relationships, and reduced eye strain. Cannon says one way she has improved in-person relationships is making a rule that there are no phones at the dinner table.

A digital declutter is simply unfollowing or “snoozing” accounts, apps, or websites that cause extra stress, comparisons, or FOMO in your life. Cannon suggested the nature of the internet is to make us feel like we’re not doing enough or not getting results. Snoozing social media may help bring back your joy.

Set boundaries

Cannon acknowledged this is so hard to do and you have to be intentional. Where can you set healthy boundaries? One way is with fans. As writers, we put ourselves out there, and there will be people who do not like what we are doing. Cannon has had to set boundaries with her own heart. Writers can also set healthy boundaries with devices or social media. Cannon noticed she would reach for her phone during morning writing time. She suggested the app [Freedom](#), which she uses to see her Google Drive, but not Facebook.

Another boundary is with your work hours, which Cannon also acknowledged is hard but that setting boundaries is sometimes a process and not an all-or-nothing activity. Setting boundaries with decision-making time resonated with the audience. We make decisions about our stories, our careers, and our posts. We come at decisions from every angle with fear and hope warring with each other.

Ask yourself: Where could simple changes eliminate some stress from my life? One example was not checking email until the writing is done. Use cool technology to make changes in your writing routine. Cannon uses the positive aspects of Google and its alarm settings to help make her mornings better.

Take the pressure off

Cannon asked in what areas of your writing life are you feeling the most pressure, anxiety, or worry. Stop planning more tasks than you have time and energy to do. Cannon says this is

her hard-hitting point. As writers, we're hurting ourselves when we stack too many tasks in our equation. Once a writer is in burnout, it takes time to recover. Stop putting more on your plate and planning more tasks than you have time and energy to do. Take a realistic look at your 30-minute task blocks, which is her method of time management.

Stop catastrophizing. For some writers, the fear of a decrease in book sales is a real issue. When you recognize a fear is hurting you more than helping, Cannon recommends therapy as a possibility. Another way to take pressure off yourself is to stop worrying about what other people will think. One path back to joy is rediscovering what you love about writing. Lean into the fun and give yourself credit for trying. Stop putting pressure on yourself to make every release the best and biggest. Some people are attached to performance but that puts pressure on our creativity. Cannon says we are on a journey where there are waves rather than a straight up or down trajectory.

She also said to stop making sales numbers mean anything at all about your worth. Ask yourself: Is that even true? Cannon suggested diving into what you're really afraid of. Ask what secret "benefit" you're gaining by punishing yourself that way. Ultimately, it becomes an excuse that steals your joy.

The next three are the big takeaways of the workshop:

Shift your energy around your definition of success

You get to define success for yourself. The tighter you hold onto an idea of success you feel is not coming, the more it begins to feel like a need. Go back to the beginning of your dream of becoming a writer. That is good energy. Cannon does not think you should compare yourself to your past self. Let go of the past. Cannon said to start over, and today is your new starting point. Define success now and turn it into a blessing. Go through the fun ride of writing all over again. What matters is how *you* see something. Someone out there is wishing for exactly what you have now.

Cannon emphasized that she has shifted her perception and now sees everything that comes her way as the cherry on top of an ice cream sundae. We're living the life we wished would come someday. Cannon encouraged writers to experience the fun of writing.

Trust yourself

We cannot control the industry or how fans respond to our books or Amazon algorithms. Cannon said we don't have to have control over it. Our success isn't based on trends. It is based on our heart, our desires, our intuition. You have survived different times of your life. You can survive again. The desire to write is in your heart.

Believe it's inevitable

Trust that it is. There is no time limit on your success. Cannon said you're stressed and afraid because you don't know the end of the story... but aren't *you* the author?

Cannon concluded by saying, “You’re writing your story.” Indulge in the delicious joy in your writing. Your future is the way you write it to be.

For a copy of her slides, go to heartbreathings.com/NINC2023.



*Tanya Agler writes sweet contemporary romance set in small towns in the mountains. Her eight Harlequin Heartwarming novels center around the themes of hope and redemption, including her latest, *Snowbound with the Rodeo Star*, the second in the *Rodeo Stars of Violet Ridge* series.*

Using Print to Diversify Your Income

Presented by Erin Wright

Reported by Lisa Verge Higgins

Erin Wright, a full-time contemporary Western romance author and co-founder of the Wide for the Win Facebook group, worked in the library world for seven years.

In this workshop, Erin Wright demystified the print world by introducing the major companies working in the print-on-demand space, the strengths and weaknesses of each one, and her best practices for a solid print distribution strategy.

She did not cover foundational print concepts (such as “What is an ISBN?”), how to increase your print sales, how to sell your book direct on your site or on consignment in stores, or how to sell print books in other languages.

Most indie authors will recognize the primary print distribution options discussed in this workshop, including KDP Print, Draft2Digital Print, B&N Press, etc. Wright’s working title for this class is “All roads lead to Ingram,” as will soon become apparent. She began by discussing a print company we’re all familiar with.

Kindle Direct Publishing Print

KDP Print is good for:

- Inexpensive author copies to sell direct.
- Selling regular print (paperback and hardcover) on Amazon.
- Free ISBNs (but she recommends buying them on your own).
- The option of case-laminate hardcovers.
- The option of using your own ISBN both on KDP Print and on IngramSpark (this is not true for other platforms).

KDP Print is not good for:

- Expanded distribution. “It’s more like pretend distribution.”
 - If you opt for expanded distribution in KDP Print, you cannot change the discount or the return policies for booksellers. By default, your KDP Print books will be set on no returns, and the discount for booksellers will be 25% (the standard traditional discount is about 50%, so 25% is very unfavorable to bookstores).
 - Also, if you check the box for expanded distribution in KDP Print, Amazon will send your book to Ingram, so you will not be able to use your same ISBN if you also do print through Ingram, because Ingram will think it’s already there.

- Although KDP Print offers the option to make large-print books, those books are very hard to find on the Amazon site and the algorithms don't index them well.
 - As a result, large print doesn't sell very well on Amazon (when you make them through KDP Print).
 - To avoid this problem, upload your large-print books to Ingram only, which will then serve that listing on Amazon.
- Preorders are not allowed for KDP Print.
- KDP Print has unreliable print quality. Note that KDP Print uses Ingram for some of their printing. When you do a KDP Print book and you're not happy with the quality, choosing to do the print copy on Ingram instead may not change anything.
- KDP Print does not play well with Ingram. If you want visibility on Amazon for your print books, you "have" to upload direct from KDP Print.
 - Amazon suppresses Ingram POD books; they'll say they're out of stock, etc.
 - If you would actually like visibility for KDP Print books, then upload direct, do not check expanded distribution, and only upload regular print books, not large print.
- KDP Print books cannot be connected to your site to provide dropshipping for your own direct sales store. You'll have to buy the books from Amazon and ship them to the purchasers yourself.

Draft2Digital Print

What D2D Print is good for:

- Getting your print book to Ingram easily.
 - Don't upload your book to D2D *and* Ingram, they'll clash.
 - But if you don't like Ingram's interface, D2D is a good way to get your book to Ingram.
- Selling regular-print paperbacks on all platforms. D2D doesn't currently do large print or other formats.
- Free ISBNs.
- D2D will make wrap-around print covers for you (from your ebook). It's not as professional-looking as getting it done by a designer, but it's free.
- Free updates to your files once a quarter.

What D2D Print is not good for:

- Cannot do hardcovers or large print.
- Cannot set your own discount or return policy. By default, D2D Print offers a 42% discount for booksellers and doesn't allow returns.
- Preorders are not allowed unless the book is complete (can't use dummy files).
- Metadata cannot be optimized for visibility.
- D2D Print cannot be connected to your website's direct store for dropshipping.
- The books are printed by Ingram, which means the same inconsistent quality.

B&N Press

What B&N Press is good for:

- Free ISBNs.
- There is no charge for update or edit fees.
- Book listings always “collapse” together without issue; your print and ebooks are all connected on your book pages.
- Preorders are allowed for books without an interior file.
- If you choose not to use B&N Press for your print books, there are no repercussions by the bookseller for that decision. B&N doesn’t fight with Ingram like Amazon does; they won’t suppress your Ingram print book’s visibility.

What B&N Press is not good for:

- B&N Press has limited trim sizes for large-print books. Ingram has a lot more options.
- B&N Press books are printed by Ingram, which means same inconsistent results.
- Using B&N Press does not get you into the Barnes & Noble stores. In fact, it can hurt you! B&N Press print books don’t allow bookstore returns, but the IngramSpark print books do. A B&N bookstore owner will always pick the returnable ones, even over books offered from B&N’s own POD press.
- Cannot use the same ISBN that you use when uploading to IngramSpark, even if you are providing it. B&N communicates with Ingram by default. If you decide to do the same print format on both B&N Press and IngramSpark, you will be required to have two separate ISBNs for the same book.
- There is no increase in royalties to go direct on B&N Press versus getting to B&N via Ingram Spark.
- Cannot be connected to your website for direct sales dropshipping.

IngramSpark

What IngramSpark is good for:

- This is where every other POD publisher is sending you anyway, for print.
- Highest control over metadata, return policy, and discounts.
- Can do large print along with a healthy variety of trim sizes.
- No upload fees, which is a relatively recent upgrade.
- Allows preorders without the interior file—you will need a placeholder though. Be sure to edit that placeholder before you send your print book out to the world.
- Has a printer located in Australia, which saves in terms of costs.
- Can do hardcovers with or without dust covers.

What IngramSpark is not good for:

- By far the most difficult site to use. It is prone to error messages. It’ll make you want to cry.
- Customer service is virtually nonexistent; you will fall into email hell with canned responses. There is no phone number, so there is no way to talk to a human.

- You will incur file update fees after 60 days from uploading, including on preorders, so make sure to time your preorders accordingly. Update fees are about \$25. (*Editor's note: NINC offers members a special promo code to waive up to five revision fees; visit the [discounts page](#) at [ninc.com](#).*)
- You have to price books higher than you are required to on Amazon. Because Ingram is a distributor, there's a bookstore in the middle, so there's an upcharge. Your price is often lower on Amazon than on Ingram.
- There are not a lot of bells and whistles to offer, such as boxed sets (with actual sleeves), bookmarks, coil binding, etc.
- Unreliable print quality.
- Cannot be connected to your website to provide direct-sale dropshipping, although that may change in the future.

BookVault

What BookVault is good for:

- Great royalty structure.
- Integrates with your direct-sales website to do dropshipping.
- *All* the bells and whistles are offered, including cardboard sleeves, bookmarks, etc.
- There's a color print fee only for pages where there is color. The cost for black and white is charged otherwise. This makes the print costs more economical for those who may have color for only a few pages, like a family tree, a map, pictures, etc.
- Preorders are allowed.
- Fantastic customer service (phone, email, even Zoom appointments).
- High commitment to print quality.
- You can use the same ISBN that you use on Amazon and Ingram, but keep in mind that BookVault's strength isn't to connect to Ingram, but to offer easy dropshipping for authors who do direct sales.
- BookVault is a British company, but they're in the middle of inking a corporate deal here in the U.S., so they'll soon have both printing and distribution options domestically.

What BookVault is not good for:

- They are not a direct distributor of print books outside of the U.K. in any meaningful way, so they are not a replacement for IngramSpark.
- BookVault works out of the U.K., so there may be some measurement and currency conversion issues at times.
- Does not provide free ISBNs. Note, though, that you could use BookVault to print special editions for sale just off your website.
- There is a monthly upload fee if you don't have a code. For BookVault, this helps keep scammers away. However, BookVault has generously offered NINC a code for unlimited use for the next three months, until just about the end of 2023. (*Editor's note: Log in to [ninc.com](#) to find the discount code.*) They are also working with the promotion team at NINC to make the code available for the foreseeable future.

Lulu

What Lulu is good for:

- Free ISBNs.
- Integrating with your website to do dropshipping.
- Lulu has their own bookstore that they promote through ads, etc., to increase traffic.
- They offer unusual bindings, linen dust jackets, coil-bound books, foil stamping, etc.
- No upload or edit fees, no yearly fees, no fees at all.
- There are a large variety of trim sizes, pretty much any size you'd like. Large print is allowed.
- Fantastic customer service (phone and email).
- High commitment to print quality.

What Lulu is not good for:

- No print preorders whatsoever, live releases only.
- If you use Lulu to get to Ingram, you cannot set your own return or discount policy. They're more into the dropshipping thing.
- Cannot maximize metadata on Ingram Spark.
- Does not do sprayed edges or embossed covers.

After summarizing the pros and cons of the print-on-demand company options, Wright offered up her suggested best-practices for print publication.

Suggested print distribution strategy

Start with KDP Print:

- Go direct to KDP Print.
- Only upload regular print paperbacks there, nothing else.
- Do not check expanded distribution.
- Upload to KDP Print first, then to IngramSpark second, if you are doing both. Why?
 - If you choose (instead) to upload your print book to Ingram first, and then Amazon second, you will have to contact Amazon and ask them to suppress the IngramSpark version (usually more expensive) so the cheaper KDP Print book will show up on your Amazon book page instead.
 - The KDP Print-first-IngramSpark-second option avoids this problem, because Amazon will already have their own print book in their system. Then, when they see the same book come in through Ingram (or any other distributor), they'll automatically suppress that second book. No calls needed.
- Order author copies from KDP Print to sell direct (they're usually cheaper).
- Avoid case-laminate covers. There's no good reason to create them, as far as she can see.

Follow with IngramSpark:

- Use Ingram to distribute to libraries and bookstores, including Barnes & Noble.

- When working with Ingram, for any book that you'd like to potentially be stocked into stores, give a discount of 53% (yes, 53%, not 55%); allow returns; and instruct them to destroy those returns. Typically, these will be regular print paperbacks.
 - The reasoning for this strategy is that bookstore managers search for books that offer a "full discount." Those books are cheaper for them to stock. 53% is the lowest percentage that can be listed for a print book to still be considered "full discount" on Ingram. Using this strategy, your books will show up at the lowest discount rate, which is better for your wallet.
 - Books that are never going to be shelved in bookstores—such as large print, hardcovers, special editions, etc.—input a 40% discount and opt for no returns. You can price these print books higher because they are for libraries and superfans. Wright makes more profit from large print and specialty books than from regular paperbacks.
- Overall Pricing Strategy: Wright likes all her print books to be consistent in pricing, both through Amazon and Ingram, and especially among all the books in a series. To achieve this uniformity, she chooses the longest print book in the series, uploads it to Ingram, determines a price that will give her at least \$1 royalties, and then sets the price of the rest of the print books in a given series to that amount, both on Ingram and Amazon. On shorter books, she'll make more profit.

Selling Direct Strategy:

- Use BookVault or Lulu, the only two companies that offer dropshipping.



Lisa Verge Higgins is a critically acclaimed author of uplifting women's fiction. Her alter ego, Lisa Ann Verge, writes award-winning historical and contemporary adventure romance.

Finding Success with Amazon Ads in 2023

Presented by Ricardo Fayet

Reported by Elaine Isaak

Ricardo Fayet oversees the marketing for all Reedsy products—Marketplace, Book Editor, Learning, Discovery—and is a big SEO and advertising enthusiast.

Ricardo Fayet, one of the founders of [Reedsy](#), a marketplace connecting authors with freelance publishing professionals, began this session by stating that the number-one factor for ad success has nothing to do with ads! He then delivered the formula for selling books:

$$\text{Revenue} = \text{Traffic} \times \text{Conversion} \times \text{Virality}$$

In brief, of all the people who land on your page (traffic), who buys it (conversion), then recommends it (virality or word of mouth), virality is the most important thing—writing a great book readers will love. Advertising drives the first part, traffic.

Prior to working on ads, make sure you've nailed your product page for conversion. This includes: cover, blurb, price and formats, customer and editorial reviews. Polish your "Look Inside." Check your A+ content, if you're using it, and punch up your author bio. If you struggle to get traction with advertising, confirm your book and page are as good as they can be.

Conversion attribution is essential to understanding your numbers. So, how does Amazon report on sales coming from your ads? Imagine three customers exposed to your ad. Gareth sees the ad, clicks through and purchases right away. Edward sees the ad, clicks, then completes the purchase 10 days later. Abigail sees the ad and doesn't click, but later searches for the book and purchases.

For Sponsored Product ads, Amazon uses click-based reporting for sales on your advertising dashboard, including sales of other products within your brand during the 14-day conversion window. Under this model, the sales to Gareth and Edward will be reported; Abigail's will not.

Sponsored products use click date reporting, but other ad types (Sponsored Brand, etc.) use conversion date reporting. If the customer clicks on day one, the sale is reported on that day, or on the day the sale is completed. This has implications for print sales, because for print books, the shipment date is considered to be the conversion date. If the book is out of stock, the conversion won't post at all to your ads dashboard if it ships after the 14-day window.

KENP reads are reported on date of reading. Reading events are recorded up to 14 days after the click (attributed to date read, if the customer doesn't open the book until then), so if they don't read for a month, it won't show up.

Fayet then gave an example for authors with series titles:

- Option 1: Advertise only the first book, meaning the author can use either Custom Text or a Standard ad.
- Option 2: Advertise all books in series. For this option, the author can only use the Standard ad type.

Gareth sees the ad, clicks and buys all five books in the series.

Edward clicks and borrows the first two through KU and the third book some time later.

Abigail clicks and reads book one, then purchases the others in print.

On the author's dashboard with option one, the author sees Gareth's order for book one. They see 300 KENP from Edward and 300 from Abigail. With option two, the author would see five orders from Gareth (all the advertised products in the campaign), plus 600 pages read by Edward, and 300 pages read by Abigail.

Fayet strongly encourages using all the series books in your Amazon ads. He laid out the considerations for campaign architecture with three basic options. First, advertising book one only, which can use custom text. Only the sales or KENP from that book will be reported on your dashboard in the 14-day window. Second, simply using all books, running a standard campaign, with all books active, and all book sales will be reported. Finally, there is a hybrid campaign. Run a standard campaign with all books, then pause all except book one. This results in sales for all of the books being reported.

If you choose option one for a long series that needs to be read in order, you need to be very comfortable with read-through math. Most readers will not complete the series within the 14-day window, but you can calculate how much the sale of book one is worth to you using formulas that include the read-through rate to the other titles.

Use the all-in strategy if the series can be read in any order. This will maximize sales and reads reported in the dashboard.

Fayet recommends the hybrid strategy especially when you only want ads for book one to be shown, but you have the benefit of more information about customer buying habits.

These multi-product ads can also send more encouraging signals to the algorithm because the ads make more money. It's easier to scale because there are more choices of ads to deliver. Fayet hopes that in the future, algorithmic updates would allow a multi-product ad to deliver the right ad to the right reader. For instance, the ad for later books will be shown to readers who have read prior volumes, the ebook ad to ebook customers, the print ad to print customers.

Fayet recommends testing to see if spend goes up, conversions go up as well with multi-book campaigns versus single book.

On the question of custom text, Fayet has concluded that it does not make a significant difference in clicks or conversions. In search results, the only products with custom text are ads, so the Standard ad also fits in better.

Target research and segmentation

The old method of setting up ads frequently had 1,000 keywords in a campaign, multiple campaigns with duplicate keywords, using low bids and budget to mitigate risk, and not being concerned about match types.

Fayet's approach seeks to focus on relevance. To do this, segment campaigns into ad groups. Use no more than 30 keywords or ASINs per ad group, and one campaign per type of targeting (category, keyword, ASIN). Start with ultra-relevant targets and progressively broaden to test more. Set up keywords from your also-boughts using author names, book titles, and ASINs as the ad groups. Harvest these keywords from later books in a series rather than look at also-boughts for book one, which may be diluted by freebie and price promotion readers.

ASIN ads (Product Targeting) will show up on the book page for those products, while title ads show up in search results as well as product pages. If you have more than a hundred also-boughts to harvest, he recommends segmenting them into smaller lists.

To take advantage of cross-learning between auto campaigns and manual, always keep one or more auto campaigns running. Fayet suggests splitting campaigns by Match Type to avoid cannibalizing: close match and loose match for one auto campaign, substitutes and complements on another. On a regular basis, run search term reports to seed high-performing keywords into your manual campaigns.

To find relevant targets, harvest authors, titles, and ASINs from also-boughts, top 100 category lists, new release category lists, Goodreads Listopia, Google results, and BookBub. Consider comp title product pages, Google's keyword planner, or using AI chats to identify more. You can also use paid tools like Publisher Rocket, Merchant Words, or Helium 10.

In order to leverage AI to find keywords, prompt the AI to describe a more famous comp text, and mine the results for possible keywords.

Boosting deliverability

Auctions are won by the ad's auction score: the bid x "quality score."

The bid is under your control, while the quality score is not. To win more auctions, increase your bids. This does mean the ad will spend more money. Look for keywords that are not delivering by using the targeting tab on the Amazon advertising portfolio page. Filter by "impressions = 0" then "Adjust bid" to raise bids on targets that are not being delivered. Until you have impressions on the target, you don't know if it's relevant, so raising the bid will give you that data.

Fayet mentioned a forthcoming automated tool called BooksFlyer, which is currently in a closed beta. It will allow authors to set up automated rules to raise their bids, setting up rules to change bids at a frequency they choose.

The ad's quality score is derived from the relevance of the advertised product (determined by clicks), the quality of the product page (how likely the page is to convert), and the historical performance of the advertising account. High relevance will give you a stronger position because your quality score goes up.

In order to raise relevance by way of click-through rate (CTR), go into each campaign. Filter for impressions over 1,500, CTR under .10, and orders = 0, then pause those keywords. This is another operation that BooksFlyer will automate.

To determine your breakeven point on an ad, don't trust sales or ACOS on the dashboard. Those sales are at full retail price, rather than showing your royalties. Determine your average royalty on sales + KENP reads, and use that to determine your breakeven bid for any given keyword by calculating net revenue on the target divided by clicks. For instance, if a campaign generates 500 clicks, and returns \$100 revenue, the breakeven bid is .20. Fayet recommends setting each bid to the breakeven bid for the keyword.

To optimize your ads, pick a reporting period of about 65 days during which you've had no price, product, or availability changes. Look at any target with more than 15 clicks to determine your breakeven point and consider changing bids. He recommends excluding the last five days because all sales may not be in. Also run search term reports to identify new keywords.

To scale your ads, automate target research. Every month, scrape new releases in your top two to three categories. If possible, use an assistant who can do cleanup so you can copy and paste (book title, author, series, ASIN). Leverage first-mover advantage by targeting books that are very hot. Add them as targets when they get a BookBub deal. Follow your top comparable authors to get the new release emails or pre-orders, then be the first to add them to your campaigns. Finally, double down on single-author campaigns by creating clear ad groups: author name, series names, series one titles, series two titles, series one ASINs, series two ASINs, etc.

Additional resources

- *Amazon Ads for Authors* by Ricardo Fayet
- *How to Market a Book* by Ricardo Fayet
- Mark Dawson's Ads for Authors course
- Nicholas Erik's 80/20 Author Ads Masterclass
- *Amazon Ads for Indie Authors* by Janet Margot
- *Amazon Ads Unleashed* by Robert J. Ryan

NINC members can download Fayet's slideshow at rdsy.me/sjninc23 and can reach him at ricardo@reedsy.com.



Former outdoor guide and climbing instructor Elaine Isaak writes the *Bone Guard* archaeological thrillers as E. Chris Ambrose.

The Future of Authorship: Leveraging AI Tools for Book Planning, Character Development, and Research

Presented by Cameron Sutter

Reported by Trish Milburn

Cameron Sutter created the [Plottr](#) book-plotting software to assist authors like himself with a crucial piece of the creative process.

In this session, Cameron Sutter showed how AI can serve a purpose while also addressing the concerns surrounding this constantly changing new tool that we may choose to add to our toolkits.

What is this AI?

Sutter began by saying that AI isn't actually artificial intelligence. It's more accurate to think of it as a machine that has taken an English course millions of times and can now understand and generate words way faster than humans. This is why you may hear the term Language Learning Model (LLM) in discussions about AI.

Fears about AI

The negative sides of AI get a lot of headlines and not without reason. After all, Skynet has been part of our lexicon since the 1980s because of that scary rise of the machines in the *Terminator* movies. Sutter addressed four main fears about AI and how it might affect authors.

It will flood the market. Sutter mentioned that we've faced similar fears before, as when viable and comparatively easier self-publishing became reality. The fear was that the marketplace would be so flooded with books, even really bad ones, that readers wouldn't be able to even find our books anymore. He admitted that to some extent this became reality but also that authors adapted and found ways to work within the new reality. He said the same will likely be true in a marketplace where AI is part of the equation.

You will become obsolete. Sutter said he doesn't believe robots will ever have emotions, and therein lies the human author advantage.

"There will always be a demand for human-written books. That's where you shine, in being more human than ever."

Will we, at some point in the future, have to label our books as "human-written" titles? Perhaps, he said. Things are changing so fast that it's hard to predict what will happen years or even months down the road. When someone in the audience said, "That's depressing," there was a lot of audible agreement.

The Jane Friedman situation. Author Jane Friedman had to deal with the unenviable situation of trying to get AI-written books that had been uploaded illegally under her name removed from Amazon and Goodreads. Such a situation can damage an author's career when bad actors piggyback on a known name and upload poorly written, AI-generated books. It confuses the reader, perhaps angers them when they realize what they've bought is basically garbage.

Author Sylvia McDaniel, who was in the audience, said this same thing happened to her. The imposter uploaded 27 books before she was successful in getting Amazon to remove them—and that only after threatening them with a cease-and-desist letter from her attorney. She's now in the process of trademarking her own name.

Is it even ethical? Sutter pointed out that AI learns similarly to how we do, by reading a lot of content over a long period of time. All of that consumed content influences how it—and we—write. You can use AI tools to help you with idea generation, not the actual words that will make up your books. It's more like a brainstorming partner.

Organizations and businesses are working to implement ways of protecting against and weeding out AI-generated content and nefarious actors. Draft2Digital has protections in place to block AI flooding their servers. Amazon will have an option to mark if your book is AI assisted or written, but audience members pointed out that this is self-selection. If someone is trying to upload AI content and pass it off as written by a human, they're not likely to suddenly be honest about that fact. Another attendee noted that this information will also not be revealed to readers buying books on Amazon.

The Authors Guild has also provided a suggested piece of text you can put in your books to help prevent your words from being used to train AI:

No AI Training: Without in any way limiting the author's [and publisher's] exclusive rights under copyright, any use of this publication to "train" generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to generate text is expressly prohibited. The author reserves all rights to license uses of this work for generative AI training and development of machine learning language models.

Use the AI – Use the Force, Luke

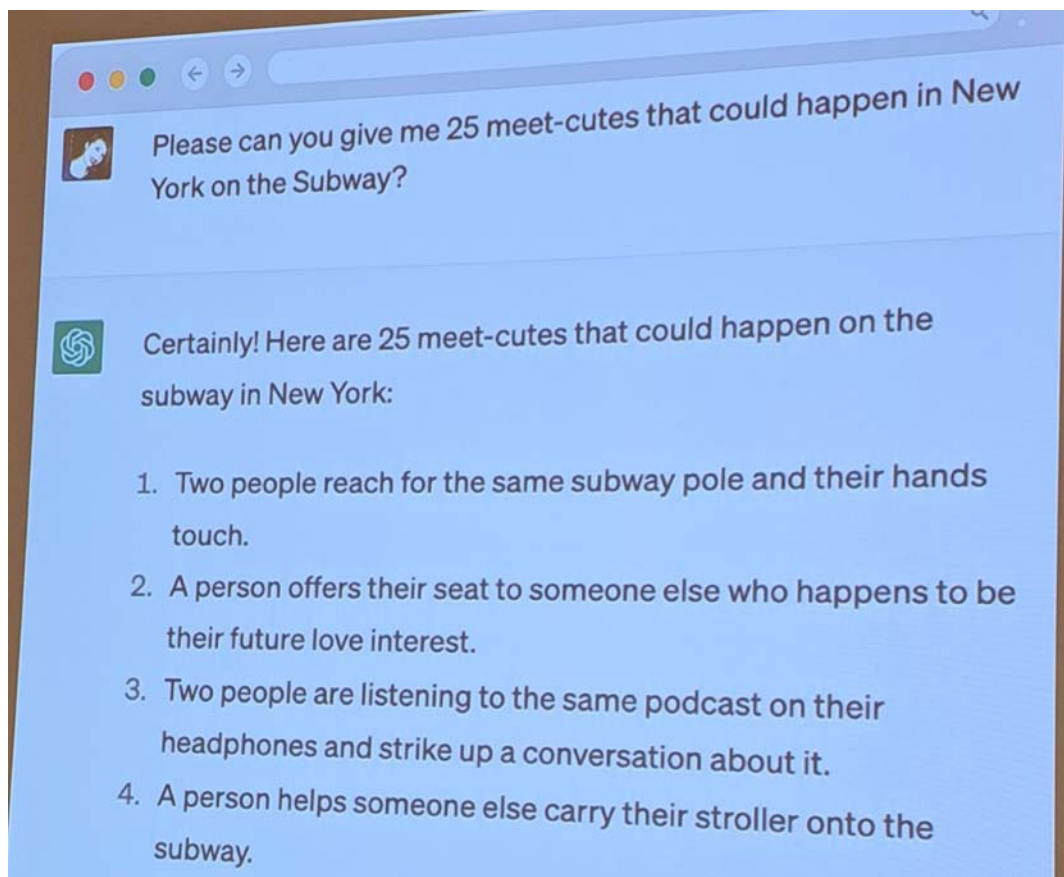
Partway through the program, Sutter shifted from addressing the concerns about AI to the ways in which AI programs can help authors be more productive.

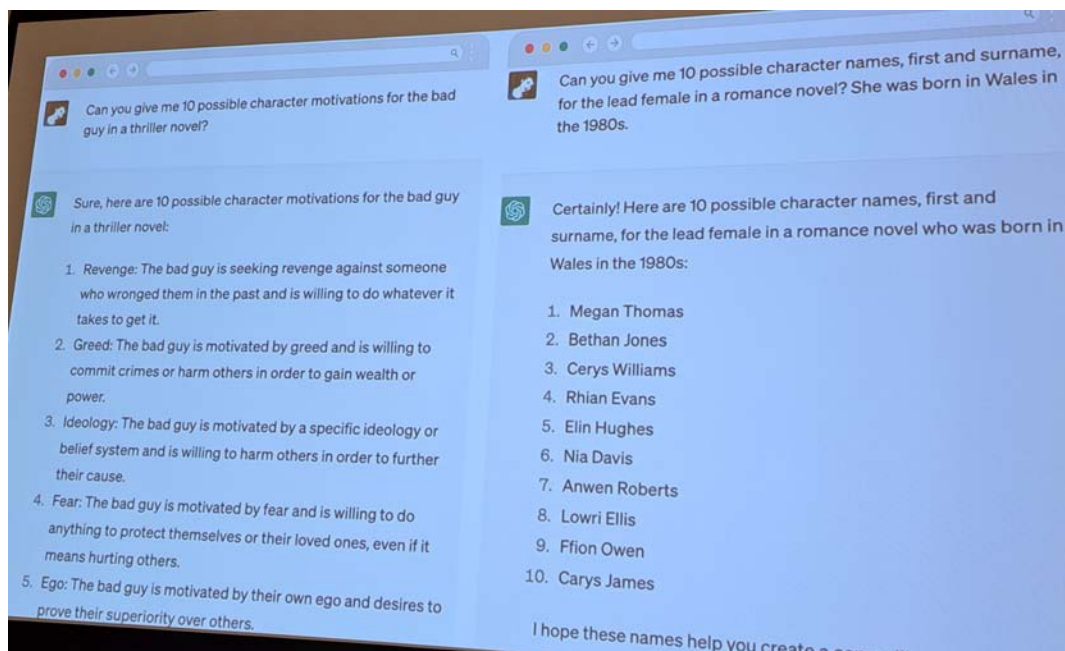
Sutter showed an example of a conversation between an author and ChatGPT in which the author asked ChatGPT to plot a sci-fi novel set on Mars for her. ChatGPT's response was, "As an AI language model, I can certainly provide some ideas for a sci-fi novel set on Mars, but ultimately the creative direction of the story is up to you. Here is a possible plot you could use as a starting point: ..."

Then the AI gave a brief plot idea followed by, "To write a fully detailed novel plot, I would need the following information..." It then asked for genre, concept/idea, characters, setting, and plot in some detail—all the things that if you had already, you could just write the book yourself.

After that, the writer asked for 50 plot ideas for events that could happen in a sci-fi novel set on Mars. ChatGPT complied, providing those ideas. Many of them are ones sci-fi readers and viewers would find familiar, but others could spark ideas for a narrative direction the author might not have thought of on her own.

Sutter then showed other prompts asking for potential meet-cute scenes in New York, then further narrowed it to a meet-cute on a New York subway. Other questions asked ChatGPT for possible character motivations for a bad guy in a thriller novel and character names for a female lead in a romance novel who was born in the 1980s in Wales. See the results below.





He mentioned several free tools available including [Midjourney](#) (used for images; can use to generate ideas for covers and marketing materials), ChatGPT, Sudowrite (which helps with actual writing), and the author-run [Future Fiction Academy](#) (prompts you through your entire book). Someone from Future Fiction Academy was in the room and mentioned that they have both a website and YouTube channel with more information.

Sutter also mentioned that Plottr is developing an AI generator to help authors using the program generate ideas for scenes, characters, and whole plotlines within the story templates available in Plottr. There are no plans for capability to actually write a story within Plottr. Also, your information will not be used to train ChatGPT.

“It will be able to pull in information you’ve already developed within Plottr,” he said. “It will already know this information and apply it.”

This capability is currently in development, but he hopes to launch it in a few months.

Links of interest

Sutter closed out the session by providing links to more information on topics he covered as well as a discount on Plottr for NINC members.

- [Girls on the Internet podcast episode with Jane Friedman](#)
- [Amazon’s new rule](#)
- [Authors Guild AI recommendations](#)
- [Kindlepreneur AI book description](#)
- [Plottr AI plot generator](#)
- [Plottr discount—special offer for NINC members](#)



Contemporary romance author [Trish Milburn](#) is considering how and how much to dip her toes into the AI world, but if she sees Arnold Schwarzenegger she's running.

Build a Three-Month Successful Ad Strategy Specifically for the Successful Indie Author

Presented by Bonnie Paulson

Reported by Janis Susan May

Bonnie Paulson is a USA Today bestselling author who specializes in marketing services for other authors.

A fast three-month ad and marketing strategy

This workshop was presented by Bonnie Paulson, owner of FindingYourIndie.com, a company offering courses on advertising and AI, ad management services, brand and business consultations, and building of awesome stores for direct sales. She is also a multi-published author.

Paulson passed out a worksheet consisting of a three-month section with spaces for current book(s), preorders, and promos. There are slots for genres and comps, and columns for tropes, themes, words, unique, similar, and other tools that can be used to fine tune your ads. On the back side is a dateless calendar grid to work out your scheduling. Copies of this worksheet are available on findingyourindie.com/NINC2023, as are most of the graphics she used during this presentation.

Paulson then gave quick definitions of the terms she used:

- **Strategy:** a planned path from one point to the next
- **Tactic:** a specific step in the direction you want to go
- **Plan:** something that will be guaranteed to get messed up
- **Scheduled:** something that's already done

Paulson first asked attendees to take stock of what they already knew from before the conference. What tactics do you know that you're already applying to your marketing? What is working? What is not?

She then had everyone add in what you had learned in the last few days. Some important questions to ask are what tactics do you want to apply? What will best fit your brand? (You must always consider your brand!) What fits your value system? What just sounds interesting? What sounds exhausting? What do you need to learn—which takes up resources, so be smart in what you choose. Paulson suggested that once you make your list, put a happy face or a star next to what fits.

You must decide what you are going to do this next quarter and what tactics you are going to choose this next quarter. Whatever you do, however, you must *be realistic*. What tactics are you *really* going to do and *not* just think about?

Some possibilities: newsletters, Facebook posts, ads, swaps, group takeovers, TikToks, tweets, Snappies, newsletter promos, blogs, ZoeBubs, signings, car wraps (this is not hyperbole; Paulson said she has actually seen a “wrapped” car advertising a new book), discounts/coupons, and ARCs. To illustrate out-of-the-box thinking, Paulson even joked about doing OnlyFans, which garnered laughter from those in the audience.

The secret to successful marketing

Paulson was most insistent that the real secret to successful marketing was to find something that worked and made sense, then be consistent in your efforts. She repeated again you must always be loyal to and protect your brand.

Consistency in efforts is important. Also remember that your name (or pen name—whatever the buyer sees) is your brand, so be consistent to it and protect it.

Paulson said it was very important to stay in the public’s eye by regular releases, but a release does not necessarily mean a new book. At least once a month you need to connect with your readers—but, she said with a grin, anything can count as a release!

In the blocks on the worksheet there is a place to list your releases for the next three months. If you don’t have a book coming out soon, anything can be a release. A box set. An audio release. An ebook (or a paperback if the ebook is already out). A sale. A contest. Branded merchandise. A new cover. You can even show two covers and ask readers to vote on which one they like the best. Choose a series or box set or a single book and focus on it. Make sure it leads into what is going on in the next month (i.e., October/Halloween, November/Thanksgiving, December/Christmas/winter, and so on.)

Identify and use your preorders, such as any this upcoming quarter, any in the next quarter, any new covers, anything that could be used to keep and stimulate your readers’ interest. Plus, don’t forget any anthologies you might be part of.

Identify any promos you’re already scheduled to do/what to do; also consider swaps, ZoeBub, round robins, group takeovers, collaborations, and anthologies.

Paulson then said, “Let’s get to work.” And work you must. You have to identify and specify your genres/subgenres and your brand. You need to understand what you’re selling, be it a single book, series, or your brand itself.

As for comps, you have to look for them, and not just for genre (which is important) but also for feel, the “experience” it gives readers. Tone, levels of sex and violence, ending style, blurb style, cover feel, and review(s) all need to be considered.

How a book makes you feel is what you need to think about. Look for “feel” in covers too. Does the look of your cover show the feeling of your story?

A list of marketing words to help you understand what you’re delivering:

- **Tropes:** for the books you’re focusing on for each month.
- **Themes:** for the book or series you’re focusing on.
- **Words:** that identify the brand, the emotion, the experience with the books/series.
- **Unique:** What makes your books one of a kind in the genres and subgenres?

- **Similar:** What makes them a good fit into the genres?
- **Other:** Feelings; common review comments, how you felt when you wrote it, etc. The “Other” is particularly good for marketing targets/selling points.

Paulson repeated yet again how important consistency was. You must note release dates, note promo dates, work your marketing in around release/promo dates, and always deliver on your brand. It is best to schedule what you can ahead of time.

Always ask yourself: What can I do that will help me push this? Should I put book one of a five-book series free? Do a 99¢ sale? What else?

Paulson said a paper calendar prominently displayed is best for keeping track. Possible ideas might be newsletter(s), tweets, Facebook posts/ads, promos, sales, and direct store contacts. Also, you should always remember that sometimes readers like absolute consistency, sometimes not—as long as the “feel” is consistent. She recommends scheduling ads mid-week for a lower cost-per-click charge. On Saturdays she culls the ads and pulls out the losers. Paulson sends emails twice a week, each one always with links at the bottom, and then in a few days resends to the non-openers with a personal little note such as “I just wanted to make sure you didn’t miss this special whatever...”

On the bottom half of the original sheet it says to identify what you can schedule, to plan times to do unschedulable things, invite readers to your page, urge email interaction, and request comments on posts.

You must decide which will be your evergreen ads. Her favorites for evergreen ads are Amazon, Facebook, and Google (though you can’t do digital products in DSP ads). Some of her favorite ads have been running for years and are still producing. (*Editor’s note: DSP means demand-side platform, software that helps advertisers automate buying digital ads.*)

What are you doing with your ads? What are you promoting? Are you delivering experience from the ad to your landing page? (In the Amazon ecosystem, your landing page is the product page.) Do you have an automation set up to fulfill sales/promos on your site?

Some pro tips

When you plan promos, etc., make sure your Amazon ads are set up beforehand to take advantage of optimized conversion activities. Don’t set the recommended \$1.50 bid. Choose something like \$0.43, and raise the price little by little. Don’t raise the budget by more than 20% at a time; you can always lower the cost per ad if you want. You can scale it up super fast, but realize by doing so you’re burning through readers.

Do your promo first; put it in your newsletter and landing page ads as Amazon will pick up on ads that garner attention. Clean up your landing page and refine your target genre. You must know who your readers are. You can also reuse old ads. Paulson has had some ads running for years. The longer they run, the more information Amazon has on potential readers. You cannot track the effects of your ads if there are too many starting at once; begin with just one or two at a time.

Every Thursday she spends up to five hours making, scheduling, gathering data on ads, etc. She tries to do this for the next three months so they are done and ready to go.

Now, Paulson said, you've already done the setup. You just need to go and implement it.



Janis Susan May/Janis Patterson is a seventh-generation Texan and a third-generation wordsmith who writes in mystery, romance, and horror. Janis and her husband live in Texas with an assortment of rescued furbabies.

Creating a Story or Series Bible

Presented by Leslye Penelope

Reported by Michele Dunaway

Leslye Penelope writes award-winning fantasy and paranormal romance as L. Penelope. She hosts the My Imaginary Friends podcast and lives in Maryland with her husband and furry dependents.

Leslye Penelope said she's been writing since she could hold a pen. A fantasy and paranormal author, she indicated she's equally right- and left-brained.

The presentation covered the following:

- What is a story bible?
- Elements of a story bible
- Techniques and tools
- Tips, strategies, and maintenance

For the purpose of the workshop, she used story bible and series bible interchangeably. Penelope said that series and story bibles are very important. She started one series in 2015 that ended in 2022. Even standalones should have a story bible. She finds it helps.

What is a story bible?

A story bible is the canonical documentation of your characters, settings, objects, histories, and other elements in your fictional world. It holds all the planning and reference material for your story or series. It can be your own personal Wikipedia.

Penelope says she's already holding the plot in her head, so the story bible is the place where everything else lives, the shared world. The bible is a good resource and extremely helpful for a team, such as when you're doing comics or spinoffs. Some organize on a piece of paper. Others on a wall. But the bible keeps track of the details.

Penelope asked the audience to think about this question:

Is this you?

- Working on a multi-book series
- You write slow and tend to forget
- You write fast and tend to forget
- Might want to write a sequel at some point in the future
- Lose track of details in your book (e.g. What happened to the dog?)
- Want to co-write or write in a shared world
- Don't want to waste time searching through your manuscript(s) to find a character's eye color, height, or what they're wearing

When working on a series, Penelope says she will go back to the series bible and reread it. She also said that story bibles help when the dogs tend to disappear. Like the author added it and it was to be important, but it gets forgotten later in the story. Same for special objects. Like, the author never talked about that ring from chapter four. Or in book three, a sister turns into a brother. Then you have to go back and change things, even in trad.

Elements of a story bible

- Planning
- Character
- Groups
- World
- Timeline
- Places
- Magic

Planning is the preproduction. She has a film background, so she described this as before the camera starts. Magic is the fantasy and sci-fi elements. Groups/world are delineated in different ways.

Planning

In this section, Penelope puts the following:

Vision statement: What do you want this story to be? This can include themes you want to explore or a belief about the world your story promotes or exemplifies.

She'll revisit this in the middle of the story, when we authors hate writing. Penelope said this is what excites her: "Why I'm writing."

Logline and blurb: Logline is a brief, one- to two-sentence summary of your story. Blurb is the back cover copy of the book.

She'll do multiple passes of this as she figures out what the book is.

Outline: A brief overview of the events of the story.

Synopsis: She's a plotter. She'll use the story bible to write the synopsis. This is a more detailed overview of the events of the story. She writes in Scrivener. She believes in fast drafts with no edits. She doesn't want to get stuck early in the process.

Questions: What you don't know about the story, characters, and world. Record things you need to decide or research here.

To-do list: Make a note of what you want to include or come back to—such as research mountains. She also keeps a list of questions, such as how does the magic actually work.

Character list: She will also keep a character list in Scrivener. It's just a list of names, a bulleted list. She can create the profile later. Not every character gets a profile. Some are walk-on extras.

Character

This section delves deeper into the characters.

Basic information: Name, age, height, weight, eye and hair color, description.

Personality: Positive and negative traits, Meyers-Briggs, Enneagrams, archetypes. What do you use to create characters? She likes onestopforwriters.com.

Backstory: Personal history, wounding event, timelines, inner journey, sacred flaw.

Relationships: Parents, siblings, etc. How they behave to other characters.

Groups

This section is species, race, nationality, ethnic groups, religion, army, etc. This is world building. Penelope will record it as she writes. Categories include the following:

- Climate and geography
- Social structure
- Government
- Economics and money
- Customs
- Beliefs
- Rituals
- Fashion and clothing
- Art, music, literature, and theater
- Education
- Military
- Healthcare and medicine
- Family life

World

This is multiple groups.

Plants: What plants and crops grow here? Are they unique or important to the story? What do you see in the river, for instance? Penelope bases it on real life things.

Animals and creatures: What are the animals and types of creatures that inhabit this world? Do they impact the plot or characters?

Food: What do people eat? Is it plentiful or difficult to come by? Do they hunt, fish, farm, trade, etc.?

Religion: What do the people believe in? Are there multiple religions? What are their customs and rituals? Who are the adherents? Names of temples? Churches?

Language and lingo: What is the language called? Where did it come from? How does it sound? How are names derived for people and places? What slang do they use? How are children named? What were parents thinking?

Sports, games, leisure: What do they do for fun? Are there pastimes common to certain groups? What are the names and rules? How much do they need to know?

Transport: How do people and resources get around? How fast can they travel? How do they communicate across distances?

Technology: What is the level of technology in the story? Are there scientists and/or magical research?

Timeline and event: Timeline is history and calendar.

History: What has happened up until now in your world? How do those events affect your story?

Calendar: Does this world/time period use our calendar? Over what period does the story take place?

Penelope makes a grid in a blank calendar and/or spreadsheet. She'll document things that affect the story. These may include things like lunar cycles since she writes fantasy.

Places

Where are people spending time? Record and describe each place. Include buildings, forests, landscapes, nations, etc.—whatever you need for your story.

Magic

Describe the magic system and how it's important to the story. Penelope may use Pinterest for this, but not a mood board.

Research: Keep track of your notes, sources, links, and bibliographies in the story bible.

Techniques and tools

Scrivener, Notion, Plottr. Other options include personal wiki software, Campfire, World Anvil, and pen and paper.

Penelope says she likes tools and tech. She tries all of it to see what works best for her.

Tips, strategies, and maintenance

- *Update it regularly.* It's not helpful if it's inaccurate. When plot goes left during the discovery process, change it. After major drafts and edits, she goes in and fixes. Figure out when is the best time.
- *Organization is key so you can find things.* She likes folders and templates.
- *Use a system with templates.* She likes templates, plug and play. She's a spreadsheet person.
- *Use a system that allows cross-referencing.* Link between two characters, template, etc.
- *Back it up!* Penelope has Time Machine and Carbonite. She doesn't trust pen and paper. Too much "My dog ate my manuscript."
- *When all else fails, you can outsource it.* The Fairy Plot Mother, for example, can create a bible for you. However, when she does it herself, it sticks in her head more.

At this point, Penelope opened up several of her programs, including Scrivener, Notion, and Plottr and walked the audience through various pieces, as different parts of her story bible go into each. If you go to her website [here](#) you will find resources for authors. The key is to make a story bible work for you.



Michele Dunaway loves creating romantic stories about characters who discover things about themselves as they travel the road to true love and self-fulfillment. Her latest is the six-book *Love in the Valley* series for Harlequin Special Edition.

Game Changer:

The New Frontier for Your Author Career

Presented by Kevin Tumlinson

Reported by Jennifer Stevenson

Kevin Tumlinson is the director of marketing and PR for [Draft2Digital](#) (D2D), the leading distributor of books by independent authors and publishers worldwide. He is also a bestselling novelist.

In the past three years, industry innovations have been compounding that will make you more money and give you more opportunities and more sources for income.

Wired for growth

The focus of the big companies in publishing is “How do we grab more of the pie?” D2D wants to make it as easy as possible for you to get your share. They buy and partner with companies that will serve their customer base. They can get you into many markets, and they’re always expanding. They specialize in growth by innovation, for example, via universal book links (Books2Read aka B2R) and other services. D2D is built on the core principle that they serve every author.

Smashwords

In 2022, they acquired [Smashwords](#), which was founded in 2008. “We never thought of them as a competitor. They were a necessary part of the publishing space. We worried at first that if they went under, we’d suffer. This might dump hundreds of thousands of authors on us, which could have meant failure-by-success for us, such as happened when Pronoun ended. Each company serves a different component of the market,” Tumlinson said.

The Smashwords store has the highest royalty anywhere at 80–85%. The range is dependent on the number of books in your cart, and other factors. Nobody else gives you that royalty. This is not a retailer exactly, but more of a hybrid publisher—only you, the author, don’t do customer service. Smashwords coupons allow for sales and discovery. Smashwords holds storewide sales at the end of the year, and with their summer and winter sales, their March Read-a-New-Book Week, and more. The Smashwords store is about to hit its seventh straight year of sales growth, bucking an industrywide ebook sales slump.

SelfPubBookCovers

D2D also just bought [SelfPubBookCovers.com](#), which offers book covers for almost any budget. You can buy premade or custom covers, or get a customization of a premade cover.

SelfPubBookCovers.com is a marketplace for cover designers, allowing them to sell to you. Features SelfPubBookCovers.com offers include customizable text right in the browser and covers for all genres.

AuthorEmail

Nick Thacker, vice president of SelfPubBookCovers.com and [AuthorEmail.com](#), founded AuthorEmail with Tumlinson several years ago. They wanted to send email without paying the kind of prices other services charged. This was the first robust email service built with authors in mind. AuthorEmail offers lower costs than competitors and robust tools, including onboarding sequences.

ScribeCount

D2D also bought [ScribeCount.com](#), which offers NINC attendees a promo code (Welcome10) for 10% off. ScribeCount delivers robust data reporting for all retailers, D2D integration, and AuthorEmail integration. Their site is beautiful and easy to read. They're constantly adding new features. They charge by what you actually make. For example, if you make \$1,000/month, the charge is \$9.99. They charge more at higher tiers of income. If your sales slump, you don't pay the higher fee. You can integrate your ScribeCount account with AuthorEmail to see what your return on investment is on a given email.

Findaway Voices/Spotify

D2D partnered with [Findaway Voices](#) in 2016/2017. Then Spotify bought Findaway. Findaway offers audiobook production for any budget, along with their marketplace. They are the D2D of audio. They offer 80% royalties, and D2D takes no cut. D2D facilitates the metadata upload. If you distribute through D2D, simply click on your audio tab and all the metadata is transferred over. You still pay for your own production. The Spotify connection means you extend your reach by 100 times.

Growth by markets

When D2D first acquired Smashwords, most of the markets were integrated already. Since then, they have added relationships with BorrowBox, which serves Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, and the U.K.; Gardners, which reaches libraries and retailers around the world; Palace Marketplace, which offers even more library distribution; and KoboPlus, which expanded into the U.K. and the U.S. and is still growing. KoboPlus is a subscription plan but it's nonexclusive. The author gets paid for the whole book once the customer reads 20% of the book. "We're seeing phenomenal growth there."

D2D print

D2D Print was new in 2018 and in beta for a long time. The original print partner was eager to get into the indie author space, but they had no clue what they were in for. They had previously dealt with mega-corporations and big publishers and were accustomed to a demand for a million copies. Now the author-client only wants one copy. Or perhaps she returns the

copies because they don't look the same. D2D has since switched to a different partner. It's getting better. "As we get breaks, as things improve for us with the partner, we pass that along to the author. Author copies may shrink in price by a few cents, thanks to this new partnership."

Books2Read

[Books2Read](#) promotional tools have been built-in and now include hardcover, large print, audio, and foreign language editions. If you distribute through D2D, any new store link will automatically add to your book's B2R page. You can make book lists, such as genre-specific lists. B2R pages can become author pages for those authors who don't have a website. These pages are marginally customizable.

New promotion opportunities

In 2021, Tumlinson's wife Kara helped build the promotions program. Now D2D has hired a new promotions coordinator, Megan Spann. "Megan goes out and finds promotions for you. If Barnes & Noble or Kobo do a themed promotion for 'books with dogs on the cover' or 'spicy romance,' Megan sends emails to everyone who qualifies for that promotion. Sometimes only a limited number can get in."

Integrating all the moving pieces

D2D offers many tools to help authors market and promote their books, including Smashwords store coupons, D2D author pages, Books2Read universal book links, B2R reading lists, and D2D promotional pricing. Look for your promotion pricing tab. Here you can set promotional prices for a date range and give it a name. As soon as you know you're in a promotion at a retailer, you set it up at D2D and it's done: it runs on time and turns off on time.

Bigger numbers at D2D mean we have more bargaining muscle. D2D serves more than 274,000 authors, 935,000+ ebooks, 36,000+ print books, and is rapidly growing, including hundreds of retailers and thousands of libraries in hundreds of countries worldwide (the number of which is also growing). D2D can get you into academic libraries, grade schools, government libraries, whoever uses their library partners. They have begun recommending promotions aimed at libraries. D2D gets better and better deals because they have bigger and bigger numbers.

The total number of promotions D2D has done this year include 38,076 emails sent, 7,262 entries received, and 5,142 titles included in promotions, a large part of them for libraries.

What's coming?

Coming soon are a full merger and migration for Smashwords authors, full integration of SelfPubBookCovers for all authors, more development for AuthorEmail, which is currently seeking to improve the user interface, and more partnerships, markets, and retailers.

Q&A

How can Palace Marketplace affect indie authors?

Palace is connecting with the Digital Public Library of America. When a library purchases a

title, they can go to [Palace Marketplace](#) to buy it from any entity. Palace also has an app to find books. If I want a book, I have to search each sales company individually and I can buy from all of them individually. This makes it easier for libraries to find your books.

If we have books in D2D, does it go into Smashwords automatically?

No, we don't put you into any store without your permission and specific choice. You can click one button to do them all, or click them one by one.

If we already have our book at Smashwords and D2D, what happens?

We'll integrate the two, merging them.

Suppose we aren't up to date with uploading the most up-to-date files at Smashwords?

We know there's that possibility. We're working on that behind the curtain. We'll be contacting you to ask which version you want to burn. Our ambition is to get it down to a one-button push, as painless as possible.

About Smashwords, I'm interested in the idea of using it instead of direct selling. Can we do a box set unavailable anywhere else, but available at Smashwords for a short period?

Yes, that's a very, very good idea. Last night we did a roundtable on anthologies and box sets, and heard a lot of cool strategies. We can manage payment splitting for you, so each author has an account for the anthology with their own tax forms, etc., so the organizer doesn't have to split it all out by hand and get the tax forms.

Resource: <http://d2d.tips/conference>



Jennifer Stevenson writes funny stuff, often with lots of sex.

Unlocking Growth: Five Essential Strategies for Expanding Your Reader Audience with Written Word Media

Presented by Emma Boyer and Clayton Noblit

Reported by Elaine Isaak

Emma Boyer, who has been working in various capacities in the book publishing industry for over 15 years, is passionate about helping authors find audiences and audiences find books. Clayton Noblit is passionate about helping authors find their readers and finding ways to sell more books.

Clayton Noblit, senior marketing manager at [Written Word Media](#), and Emma Boyer, the company's vice president of operations, used this session to help attendees understand how to organize what they learned at the NINC conference into strategies they can employ in their author businesses.

Your products are books, and marketing is how you sell your products. When asked, most authors report that they don't enjoy marketing, or don't enjoy it much. Marketing is often a challenge for authors, regardless of experience or success level.

In order to build your business, the author must not just focus on tactics like an ad campaign or a newsletter, but instead develop strategies those tactics fit into. Noblit and Boyer introduced their "audience expansion flywheel," consisting of the following elements, feeding into each other:

1. Conversion optimization
2. Growing paid audience
3. Grow your owned audience
4. Build your brand
5. Be findable

Doing all five will supercharge your strategies. Consider how you're doing on each of the five to help prioritize where you will focus.

The goal for conversion optimization is to get as many people as possible to buy the book after their exposure to it. Without this, marketing spend may be wasted. The factors you can affect are the book's description, reviews, cover, and metadata like keywords and categories. Amazon's number one tip is to revisit your metadata if your ads aren't serving or aren't converting.

Revisit conversion frequently. Build the habit of ensuring you test and iterate on the factors affecting your conversion rates. At least quarterly is a good starting point for most authors. It's not that your book has changed in the meantime, but the world has changed around it. Look for new comps, for example. New authors and trends may affect how your book compares with others in the marketplace.

How would you grade your conversion optimization? Make it a goal to improve during your next conversion audit.

The second strategy involves growing your paid audience, defined as any traffic that comes to your book through a paid mechanism like an ad or promo. All the outreach authors can do through free approaches is unlikely to have the reach of paid promotion for audience building.

Boyer displayed this quotation from Steuart Henderson Britt: "Doing business without advertising is like winking at a girl in the dark. You know what you're doing, but no one else does."

She updated it to say that doing business without a paid audience is like dancing in the dark.

In order to leverage this audience, employ email and price promotions. Consider digital ads on a variety of platforms. Look into promo stacking for maximum impact, and any form of lead generation. This is Written Word Media's niche, and they offer many types of promotion in this area including advertising services, FreeBooksy, Fussy Librarian, and other related brands. One of their new offerings is [Promo Stacks](#) based on genre and how many days you'll run the promotion.

In addition to their promotional mailings, Written Word handles Facebook and Amazon ad campaigns to their custom audiences based on their subscribers. You can make an account to save your books in the site for future promos. Membership levels confer additional benefits, like early access or discounts with industry partners.

Leverage your owned audience

Any audience you own is more trustworthy than paid promotion because platforms may change, and they may stop working for you. An "owned audience" is any audience you can reach directly. To begin building this audience, you'll need a website, email signup form, contact list, and an email service provider. Marketing with your owned audience is also cheap compared with running ads. Your email list is your best direct line of contact in digital marketing.

In order to grow your list, make sure your website is easy to find, and that your reader magnet offer and email sign-up are clear. Incorporate your newsletter sign-up into social media profiles and posts. Include it in your back matter, paired with a bonus or other freebie. You can also use paid promotions, like Written Word's new [Subscriber Surge Giveaways](#), which host a giveaway page for 60 days in addition to promoting the page. Unlike other similar services, Written Word handles fulfillment of the ebook you offer.

In order to utilize your audience, consider direct sales in addition to sharing launch information. Ask your subscribers for reviews. Consider how your newsletter and other points of contact build your fandom and increase reader value.

Don't be afraid to ask the readers on your list for help. Ask for their assistance spreading the word about new releases. In later newsletters, thank the readers for their help and show their impact.

Building your brand gives context to your communications with readers. Many large advertisers (Coke or Disney, for instance) don't need to tell you what they sell in their ads. Instead, they place it into context by suggesting how it will make you feel as a consumer.

Write your own brand brief to guide your messaging. Begin with the visual: colors, fonts, and images you'll use on social media, website, newsletter, and maybe covers. Using these elements consistently helps your audience recognize your products and messages.

As you develop your brand, consider your personality. What traits can you emphasize? The key isn't necessarily to tell a unique story about your author business and your product but instead to build authenticity. Deliver something readers can recognize and connect to. Think about it like creating a caricature of yourself. What's your tone in your emails? How do you speak to your readers?

Member Cecelia Mecca said she created wallpaper for her laptop that shows her brand promise, colors and tone as a reminder of what she's trying to deliver. She does an annual brand audit to see how readers are responding, using reviews, and a reader survey to ensure she's still on target.

In order for any of this work to pay off, you must be findable. Making it easy is the key. A website that's slow to load, using a different name on your social media sites, any source of friction can turn off potential readers and send them away. If you get the system set up clearly at the start, you'll know people can find you consistently.

In order to be findable on social media, Noblit considers Facebook, Instagram, and retailer pages to be essential profiles. TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) are bonuses. On your author pages, deliver a good description of who you are along with a call to action, like asking readers to follow, sending them to your website, or a newsletter sign-up.

Make sure to tie the profiles together by using a real photo, and the same photo across platforms including Facebook, Amazon author page, and BookBub. As much as possible, try to use a common naming convention for your social media (i.e., "authurname books" or "authurname author"). Including "author" or "books" can help to differentiate you immediately from others who may have a similar name. Then, make sure to use your brand in your posts. Consider making a consistent, regular post that includes your brand colors. Employ your brand in headers and other aspects of your profiles and pages.

On the book marketing flywheel, each component can feed the others. You can begin anywhere, depending on your priorities. The more you use these five elements together, the more they can strengthen each other and help you build your audience.



Former outdoor guide and climbing instructor Elaine Isaak writes the [Bone Guard](#) archaeological thrillers as E. Chris Ambrose.

How to Scale Your Author Business for Long-term Success

Presented by John P. Logsdon, Bonnie Paulson, and Joe Solari

Reported by Elaine Isaak

Joe Solari is the managing partner of Claymore Consulting. Bonnie Paulson is a bestselling author who also specializes in marketing services for authors. John P. Logsdon is co-owner of the Author Helper Suite and Indie Marketing Mastery.

The three presenters developed [Indie Marketing Mastery](#) after NINC 2022 to help authors of multiple books apply the strategic concepts in Joe Solari's work with the tactical expertise of John P. Logsdon and Bonnie Paulson. Logsdon is the co-owner of [Author Helper Suite](#) and author of comedic fantasy among other genres, while Paulson, in addition to writing her own books, founded [FindingYourIndie.com](#).

Authors can build on what's most important to them and their brand. Applying the ideas in the right way can make magic happen, including launching books without advertising into low numbers on Amazon's list. The presenters provided a handout as a QR code in the slideshow which can be downloaded at [FindingYourIndie.com/IMM](#).

The handout and presentation began by showing four statements, and asking authors to rate from one to five the extent to which they agree.

1. I have a marketing process that allows a reader to nurture beyond 90 days from finding me. *(This means you're taking care of the customer and growing with them.)*
2. I have a process map and understand all the customer journeys through my marketing. *(The customer journey takes readers from the point of advertisement to the book, through multiple books or series.)*
3. I have a marketing system that scales with the audience as it comes to me. *(Your system can handle increased volume as your audience grows.)*
4. I have a customer retention system. *(You have a method that's keeping the customers with you, that says, "I want you here, and I want you in my ecosystem.")*

Adding your ratings reveals your score, between four and 20. The average score from the presenters' survey of 320 authors was 7.6, so the average author has 62% room for improvement. When you feel more confident about your marketing, and can see that in a numerical way, it can help you move ahead. Revisit the questions periodically and give a new rank as you work on your author business. Use this changing number as a benchmark for your progress.

Alas, there's no easy button. Building a nurturing system takes extensive work, but opens your business up to 6.5 to 9 times more customers. Relationships need a lot of nurturing, even business relationships with readers. The goal is moving your marketing focus beyond that one-click voracious reader, to see the larger audience who don't know who you are yet. Building automated systems allows readers to learn about your work in a self-paced way, while minimizing your future time commitment. Even if every author does the actions described, the power will not dilute.

You provide three key components:

- Your brand
- Your customers
- Your product

The first step is fixing or building your retention system. Most marketing focuses on the 10–15% of one-click buyers, but advertising doesn't scale well. Building an audience can scale by systematizing cumulative advantage. The key to this approach is segmenting your mailing list to maximize impact.

Paulson pointed out, "Your advertising searches for cold audience. You can only hit them with so many ads, but when you have a strong system in place for an audience you own, you can scale them from cold to warm to enthusiastic."

Most marketers discuss the economics of making advertising profitable—reaching that cold audience—rather than building a sustainable, profitable business. Instead, keep the customers returning through loyalty mechanisms—treat them as special.

One question to assess where you are in developing this system is: If you don't have a release, will you sink? Or is your author business self-sustaining even without regular releases?

Authors face numerous challenges, including platforms hiding customers so you have to keep coming back and paying to activate them. We often have high customer attrition, especially among our biggest fans because they've blown through the series and produce no more revenue until the author produces more material. We have a lower price-point product, competing in an advertising world with higher price-point products. We are presented with misleading strategies from digital marketing. Finally, we compete in a winner-take-all popularity market: A small portion of titles make most of the money.

To surpass these obstacles, treat your customers like you'd like to be treated. We can do this by controlling the brand experience. Small things you do to compound your customer advantage can work faster and faster.

Authors want a product (the reading experience) that customers attach their identity to when they enjoy it. We need a way to collect and engage past customers and know how to engage with them. We'll achieve this goal by building a scalable system for retention. What if you could improve your read-through by 4–10%? It's not about the size of the list, it's about the segmentation. You have to know how to engage with the audience you have such that they become your brand ambassadors.

Begin by coaching the reader through your series with your email sequence. Ad costs and other investments remain the same. You make the system one time, and it continues to work

without your active intervention. However, it will take a lot of work up front to establish the system.

As an example, Logsdon wrote a short story and split it across the related series, with a scene at the end of each, so readers don't get the ending until they've read all five books. This also gets the reader used to clicking. He sends Sunday Stories emails, encouraging the reader to click at the end for a philosophical note. This approach to feeding out the work keeps readers in the author's ecosystem.

Paulson described a simple onboarding sequence, starting with two or three emails: welcome, favorite part, wrap-up. Do this with your most successful series. Build out the read-through process on the first three books. To see Paulson's example in action, pick up her yellow cover reader magnet [on her website](#). This will enroll you in her three-step welcome process.

Solari showed a highly detailed ("Game of Cults") process map to help authors set up a system (available [on his website](#)). He then described a simplified system.

Objective: to nurture the reader from book to book, increasing read-through.

The reader completes book one, seeing a back matter offer of bonus material. A click triggers the welcome email series and adds the reader to an email segment, "Book one." The reader should then be removed from the "cold" or "warm" customer segments.

When the reader completes book two, they reach a new back matter offer of bonus material. Clicking leads them to an email series specific to that book and building toward the next. They are automatically added to the "Book two" segment and removed from cold/warm/book one segments. The same thing happens as they complete book three.

A reader reaches the end of a book in a highly suggestible state. How can you motivate them to click something? What can you offer that's on-brand?

Sign up for Solari's [Autoresponder Advantage](#) for more information about how to set up the system.

Direct sellers don't need a form to trigger a read-through sequence. Your sales software (Shopify or WooCommerce, for instance), can trigger movement by the purchase of the next book. Use groups in your mailing program to set up the triggers. Brainstorm what you might use for your bonus offer. Ideas include an author interview, character interviews, bonus story, or deleted scene. Keep the reader immersed and let them know you care.

To audit your approach, create a list of where you have something to offer between books.

Audit your groups or tags in your email provider. Do you have a list of tags for each book that you'll add the reader to as they progress through your system? Do you have a list of tags to remove them from when they move from one section to another? Ask readers if they're a slow or fast reader, then use that tag to change the pace they receive the automations.

What is the email automation theme for each book? How do your emails deliver on your brand promise and keep the reader identifying with your characters and story experience? You might create a different voice or persona for the email series, or write from a character's perspective. You could use a different style of email sequence depending on purchase or entry point.

A sample series of emails might do the following:

1. Did you receive the book you requested? If not, here's the link!
2. A few days later: have you had a chance to read the book? Click here not to be bothered—click here to learn about my favorite parts.
3. Talk about the next book and why the author loves it.

Talk to them at their level to build the relationship.

In some email providers, you can create a survey, then automatically sort readers based on the answers.

Solari showed the power of a segmented list using the example *A Kingdom This Cursed and Empty* by Stacia Stark, book two in a new series. The book launched on Aug. 18. On Aug. 19, the book was at 264 in the store, and an email was sent to 2,293 people who had completed book one. This email yielded a 69.86% open rate and 9.2% click rate. Ten hours later, the book hit #37 and stayed in the top 100 for 72 hours. On Sept. 14, the book was still ranked at #484, with 1,596 ratings.

By sending pre-qualified customers to Amazon on the release day, authors can improve profit, reduce the need to create weekly content, and scale readily to a larger audience. The email system is paced to the reader, and nearly all of the set-up effort is reusable. If the message is on brand, readers want to stick around.

Q&A

Rather than use a different delivery mechanism for the bonus content, should you give a coupon to download from your direct store?

Yes. This trains your pixel with qualified customers.

How does the sequence play with your regular newsletter sequence?

It enables you to train them when they come to your brand, making choices like joining your group, only getting new releases, etc. If they self-sort this way, your newsletter becomes a bonus because they love your brand.

For Logsdon, what triggers people onto the Sunday Stories list?

They receive an invite to join in the welcome email. He currently has 52 weeks of content and is constantly adding.

The member writes very strong cliffhangers in the books, so readers often burn through the series in a weekend. How do you retain them for 90 days?

Write a side story, and the only way they can get it is to come to the author's site.

Do you use a different system to send automated emails like "abandoned cart" or the integrated system with your shop?

Before you deploy an integrated system, ask if the sequence is on-brand for you or does it become too commercial?

If you already have a list segmented this way, how do you integrate this advice with your existing list?

You're trying to help Amazon find the right customers by sending the best customers first. Traffic (without conversion) is not your friend if you're sending to Amazon. In 24 hours, all the list segments will receive the new release email.

Solari advises cleaning your list by surveying the customers, asking what they want and where they're at, for instance, how many of the books they've read. Segment those groups and customize mailings for those readerships. Sequence emails on earlier books prior to next release.



Former outdoor guide and climbing instructor Elaine Isaak writes the [Bone Guard](#) archaeological thrillers as E. Chris Ambrose.

Level Up With Author Assistants

Presented By Samantha Williams and Ashley Loboeki

Reported by Steven Womack

Samantha Williams is the CEO and founder of Aurora Publicity. Ashley Loboeki is the company's publishing director.

If there is one thing all authors share—whether traditionally or independently published—it's that at some point in our careers and work life, we have all felt totally overwhelmed. Even traditionally published authors with traditionally supportive publishers (Do they even exist anymore?) find themselves gobsmacked by the amount of work required of a successful writing career. The demands of social media, networking, administrative tasks, time management, bookkeeping and bill-paying, staying on top of correspondence, work-life balance, and a million other things can suck the oxygen out of the room, cutting into the time and energy we need to create the heart of our work: stories.

We've all dreamed of being able to turn over some of this burden to someone else. But how do you make that happen?

Samantha Williams and Ashley Loboeki began their exploration of this by distributing hard copies of the workbook they developed at [Aurora Publicity](#), *The Author's Ally Workbook & Calendar: How to Level Up Your Author Career with Author Assistants*.

They've made [this workbook](#) available as a downloadable document.

The first step in this process is to determine your "style" as a writer. What kind of author are you and how do you approach your business? As they explain in the workbook, understanding your unique style is the key to unlocking your full potential. They created an exercise which authors can use to figure out exactly which category they fall into:

- *Idealistic* authors are fueled by passionate purpose, maintain a positive brand image, and thrive on author engagement. The risk to idealistic authors is that their ambitions and goals can come into conflict with their available time and resources and they risk burnout.
- *Emotional* authors establish trust, forge enduring emotional bonds, and hold great career potential. But the balance between authenticity and commercial demands can be a daunting one. Seeking constructive feedback and support can help meet the high expectations of both yourself and your readers.
- *Logical* authors offer consistency, broad appeal, and adaptability. They have high commercial potential, but may grapple with emotional depth, which can lead to formulaic storytelling and difficulty connecting with readers on a deeply emotional level. Trusted beta readers and editors can help.

- *Driven* authors bring a high level of passion, dedication, a strong brand, and resilience to their careers and business. Their intensity, though, can lead to overwork and perfectionism, which can result in burnout. Finding balance, setting realistic goals, seeking support, and prioritizing self-care can help.
- *Realistic* authors are practical, set realistic goals, and adapt well to challenges. However, they are less inclined to take risks and so grow their careers at a slower pace. It helps to remember that sometimes embracing calculated creative risks, experimenting with innovative styles of storytelling, and not staying in one's lane can have great rewards.

Once your author style is determined, you have to decide which tasks an author assistant might tackle for you. What overwhelms you the most? Do non-writing tasks take over your work time, sometimes without you even realizing it? Do you struggle to reach, or even set, career goals?

Then other factors come into play. Are you the kind of writer who can let go of some control? In other words, can you delegate or are you a compulsive micro-manager? In what specific area do you need the most help from an assistant? Your marketing efforts? Social media? Scheduling? Which tasks do you enjoy and embrace and which ones make you want to pound nails into your ears? Social media can be especially problematic. Maybe, like me, you can handle X (formerly known as Twitter) but absolutely *despise* Facebook.

Additionally, there are some tasks associated with your career that should not be left to an assistant. Your engagement with readers, for instance, should be authentic and reflect your true, unfiltered personality. If you manage an author or Facebook group, that should be something you do personally.

And, finally, for some writers there's an even more essential consideration. Can you afford an assistant?

Williams and Loboeki also emphasized the need to establish clear goals, including in their workbook the **S.M.A.R.T.** system of setting goals. Under this rubric, you should set goals that are:

- **S=Specific.** Your goals should be clearly defined.
- **M=Measurable.** Your goals should be quantifiable and assessable.
- **A=Achievable.** Aim high, but make sure your goals are attainable.
- **R=Relevant.** Any goals you set should contribute to your long-term success.
- **T=Time-Bound.** Set a specific timeframe for your goals. Better yet, set a deadline.

Answering these questions and setting S.M.A.R.T. goals will bring you the clarity you need to move forward in your search for the right assistant.

Williams and Loboeki also outlined what they called "best practices" for working with an assistant. The relationship between an author and an assistant is in many ways a close, personal, even intimate bond requiring good communication, trust, and honesty.

This relationship works best, they emphasized, when the author establishes certain things up front:

- Clearly defined roles and expectations
- Open, transparent communication
- A clearly defined workflow
- Provide clear instruction and expectations
- Prioritize tasks
- Use project management tools like Basecamp or Asana
- Delegate research tasks
- Provide constructive feedback and address problems directly
- Invest in training

Each author/assistant relationship will be a unique and personal work in progress that will evolve over time. Trust is required on both sides. Several author assistants during the Q&A at the end of the panel offered that they had signed confidentiality agreements, which may be something for authors looking for assistants to explore.

The takeaway from this discussion was that author/assistant relationships can be beneficial to both parties and that they can make writers more productive, healthier, and happier. A little bit of stress and pressure helps many writers perform at their best, but too much can lead to burnout or even break an author.



Past NINC president and current NINC board member [Steven Womack](#) is the Edgar and Shamus Award-winning author of the Music City Murders series, which was the first mystery series set in Nashville, Tennessee.

Owning the Customer Journey: Utilize Direct Sales Tactics to Grow Your Book Business

Presented by Matt Briel

Reported by Trish Milburn

Matt Briel is an entrepreneur and the Vice President of Marketing & Communications at Lulu.com.

Right from Matt Briel's introduction that described him as equal parts loud music, Disney culture, tattoos, and book nerd, there was a feeling that he was a good speaker for one of the Saturday afternoon sessions. In fact, he gave a nod to those in attendance after lunch on the last day of the conference when everyone was tired and full. As vice president of marketing and communications for [Lulu.com](https://lulu.com), he's developed a unique passion for helping creators and authorpreneurs become more successful by leveraging books as a catalyst for new opportunities and sustainable revenue. And, of course, that's exactly what we all want as working novelists.

Briel began by outlining the three main areas he was going to address:

- Direct sales and the mindset shift that's needed to be successful with print, which is Lulu's focus;
- The importance of acquiring customer data for growing your book business, and
- Top direct sales tactics used to grow and sustain your book business.

Why should you care about selling direct? Because print books still have three times more sales than ebooks.

"Direct sales will become the standard," Briel said. "It's not if, but when you start doing it."

You should experiment with direct sales if you've wondered any of the following:

- How many of my Amazon sales were because of me?
- How can I create a better experience for my buyers?
- How many of my sales were from repeat buyers?
- How are my buyers finding me and my books?
- Are any of my buyers interested in print versions?
- How can I build a stronger community around my books?

Briel said there are four big benefits of having a direct sales strategy.

1. **Customer data:** Build your own customer database and grow your community.
2. **Revenue:** Quick access to revenue, higher profit margins.
3. **Marketing:** Control and shape the customer journey, increased brand integrity.
4. **Flexibility:** Create and release content the way that you want.

Put on a second hat and shift your mindset. To illustrate this point, Briel put up a slide with a quote from rapper and producer Jay-Z: “I’m not a businessman. I’m a business, man.”

That’s the mindset shift right there. We are all writers, yes. But we are also all businesses. We don’t just run a business. We *are* the business.

Briel stressed that while adding direct sales to your business can be hard, it’s not as hard as writing multiple books. He stated this more than once. Even though there’s no “easy button” for setting it all up, there are tools and resources available to help you through the process.

He said to stay focused on your reader base and building a community around your work. This is a long-term investment in your ability to sustain a career as an author.

Running an online store means you’re capturing a lot of data from your customers during transactions and delivery. When you collect and manage customer data efficiently, the benefits that you unlock have a positive impact on all aspects of your business.

While the idea of diving into direct sales can seem overwhelming, and is indeed no small amount of work, Briel said to tackle it bit by bit and build your database in layers. Start with your platform—Shopify, WooCommerce, etc. The next layer can be Lulu for fulfillment of print books. Next is your email service provider for ecommerce such as [ConvertKit](#), [Shopify Mail](#), [Klaviyo](#), [MailerLite](#), [SmartrMail](#), [Drip](#), etc. Apps such as [TaxJar](#) and [Quaderno](#) can help you navigate the tax collection and payment parts of selling direct to consumers. Anything you want to do via your online store, you can probably find an app that will integrate with your selling platform and that will work within your overall budget.

Customer data and why it’s the lifeblood of your business

Briel shared a slide with another quote, this one from Tim Berners-Lee, the English computer scientist who invented the World Wide Web: “Data is a precious thing and will last longer than the systems themselves.”

The ability to collect data about your customers firsthand leads to more opportunities for getting qualified feedback from people who have actually purchased your book. Building a computer database with that qualified data allows you to make better-informed decisions about your business, including revenue projections and cost analyses. Most importantly, acquiring and owning your customer data allows you to remarket to your buyers and generate repeat business.

“It’s more cost-effective to keep a customer you have happy than to acquire a new one,” Briel said.

Three types of data used for growth:

1. **Personal data:** This includes information like the customer’s name, phone number, email address, mailing address, birthday, etc.
2. **Behavioral data:** Information that is captured during the customer journey such as products purchased, average order value, cart abandonment data, and customer lifetime value.
3. **Attitudinal data:** Includes customers’ emotions and perceptions about the experience they received from you. This information is captured through feedback surveys, interviews, customer complaints, and reviews.

Briel said one of the greatest things about collecting, analyzing, and leveraging customer data is that you can predict future customer behaviors and make better decisions based on what you already know about your customers. Your customer data is the fuel for creating smarter acquisition and retention strategies.

Top direct sales tactics for growth

There are two main channels for growth:

- Email lists for customer retention, increasing sales, and community growth
- Social media for new reader acquisition as well as customer retention

Briel said you can “seduce” readers with several social media tactics:

- Cover polls and reveals
- Unboxing videos
- Short surveys for feedback and new content ideas
- Book reviews and testimonials that provide social proof
- Support your community and share events
- Share news related to your field, your book, or your audience

A few tips for using social media

1. *It's harder to get straight A's in five subjects than it is for two subjects.* Don't feel like you have to show up on every social media platform. This leads to burnout and often not doing any of them well. Instead, pick one or two you're comfortable with, where your audience hangs out, and where you can commit to showing up authentically and consistently.
2. *A little conversation goes a long way.* Try to engage with your readers' comments, questions, and DMs if you can. Readers like to feel heard and that there's an actual person on the other end.
3. *Make it easy for your readers to buy.* Make sure your book's sales page or your website is easily accessible from all your social media platforms (link in bio, pinned post, etc.). Make it very easy for readers to find your books without spam-sharing the links. Briel said that anywhere you can get away with putting a link to your store, do it.
4. *Protect your brand.* Whenever possible, use the same social handle across all platforms. That handle should be your author or brand name, not book-specific.
5. And the most important social media tip... *Don't build your home on rented land!*

“Every follower you have on Twitter (X), Facebook, etc., they aren't yours,” Briel said. “Think about how to take back what you've given to these other platforms.”

Engage with email

Automated email flows, such as those in a welcome series or cart abandonment series, are critical to success in selling direct. Polls and surveys help keep your readers engaged with you,

your books, and the world you've built. Newsletters, newsletter swaps, giveaways, promotions, and inactive win-back campaigns are other ways to keep in touch and engaged with your readers.

Briel said that "Forward to a Friend" campaigns are great because when your reader forwards a newsletter or email about your books to a friend, it's coming from a trusted source. Such campaigns have a spot for those who are receiving the forwarded email to sign up for your newsletter. You can then segment those new subscribers and offer them a special bundle or something similar.

Tips for using email

1. *Obsess over subject lines.* An impressive 47% of people open emails based solely on subject lines. Create a curiosity gap with your subject lines to entice readers to open the email. Keep it short and avoid gimmicks like all caps or excessive exclamation marks, which can get you flagged as spam by email service providers. Use emojis judiciously to add a touch of personality and attract attention.
2. *Make good use of transactional email.* These have huge open rates of 60% on average, compared to an average open rate of 18%–19% across all email in all industries. Why do these types of emails, which include order confirmations, have such high open rates? Because they are both expected and anticipated. Customers seek them out. Utilize space at the bottom of order and shipping confirmation emails for subscriber opt-ins or suggesting other books in your catalog or series.
3. *Optimize for mobile.* Almost 50% of opens are on mobile devices. You want a responsive design that looks good on all devices. This includes using a single-column design with smaller images and less text when possible.
4. *Always get consent.* Offer clear options for users to opt-in or opt-out of marketing emails. Be transparent with your users about the kind of content they can expect when they subscribe to your emails, and you will build an engaged list with higher open rates.

"Unsubscribes are not bad," Briel said. "You don't want an unhealthy status with your email service provider or to be flagged as spam if a lot of subscribers don't open your emails."

Briel also said that if there's one area where you should splurge on a monthly fee, a good email service provider is it.

What is a Lulu?

Lulu has nine print facilities worldwide that print more than 3.5 million books a year. More than 2.5 million creators have already used Lulu to print not only paperback and hardback books but also calendars, magazines, and comic books. The Lulu bookstore averages a million page views a month. Volume discounts are available for author copy purchases. They can integrate with Shopify, WooCommerce, Zapier, and custom APIs (application programming interfaces).

Final thoughts

Because we tend to get siloed in our chosen field, Briel said we should look outside of the world of publishing to find entrepreneurial concepts being used in other types of businesses that we might be able to apply to our own. This may come as a surprise, but he said LinkedIn is having a resurgence as businesspeople and their conversations flee the former Twitter.

Since Briel is a horror fan, let's end this report with a quote from Stephen King which was on one of his slides: "Talent is cheaper than table salt. What separates the talented individual from the successful one is a lot of hard work."



Trish Milburn is the author of more than 50 titles, including her indie-published Idol in Love K-pop romance series and the Jade Valley, Wyoming series for Harlequin Heartwarming.

The 80/20 Plan for Building from Five to Six Figures (and Beyond)

Presented by Nicholas Erik

Reported by Pam McCutcheon

Nicholas Erik is a SF/F novelist who writes as [DN Erickson](#), runs marketing campaigns for authors in multiple genres, and writes guides for authors on how to sell more books.

In this session, [Nicholas Erik](#) showed us how to use a simple, straightforward method for building your career to six figures and beyond in three years or less... in any genre.

The Pareto Principle asserts that 20% of all actions produce 80% of the results, so since only a few things move the needle, it's important to choose the right 20%. In his experience in working with authors, Erik found three main traits common to seven-figure authors:

1. **Consistency:** Publishing books that deliver what readers want in their chosen subgenre (the intersection where the market wants what you like to write).
2. **Good packaging:** Blurbs and covers that appeal strongly to readers of the subgenre.
3. **Newsletters:** Having a direct communication channel with readers.

Once you have the first two, your main focus should be on getting the books in as many readers' hands as possible.

There are two key questions you should ask yourself:

1. What can I do today to make more money a year from now? Answer: Use this strategy.
2. How can I remain a full-time author for 20 years? Answer: By developing evergreen assets such as your newsletter, backlist, author branding, etc. Also develop evergreen skills that have a shelf life of three or more years. For example, spreadsheet skills are evergreen, but Amazon ads are not because they require constant updating. You need non-evergreen skills as well, but building evergreen ones helps you establish a strong foundation. Investing 30 minutes a day in an evergreen asset will pay incredible dividends over three years.

A good strategy is built around your strengths and gives you structure for when things get rocky. He uses the analogy of a sled dog team. If half the dogs are not pulling their weight, progress slows. If half the dogs are pulling in the wrong direction, you stall. He isn't suggesting you do more stuff, but have all the stuff you're doing pull toward the same destination (what you really want).

He suggested two exercises to help with this:

1. Write down what you want from your writing (money, fame, prestige, popularity, sharing ideas, working for yourself, learning your craft, etc.). There are no wrong answers—the question is what do *you* want?

2. Write down your strengths. Also ask an author friend or family member for their honest feedback on what you're good at. Use those strengths to achieve what you want.

Here's Erik's basic strategy, assuming the core objective is to make six figures (though most of his experience is with Kindle Unlimited authors, this also works for wide authors):

1. **Releases:** Release at least four 40,000-plus-word, full-length novels in a single series under one pen name each year. You need at least five books in a series to make Amazon ads work well, so you'll start seeing scalability with your ads and revenue going up at books six, seven, eight, etc. If you are releasing fewer books, you can compensate with more promos, stronger blurbs and covers, stronger on-genre books, or a deeper backlist.
2. **Packaging:** Ensure your blurbs and covers are strong and on brand. Check the Top 100 on Amazon for your subgenre.
3. **Traffic:** Narrow down your traffic sources (where you send readers from) to one ad platform (Facebook or Amazon) and one social media site (TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, etc.). If you don't care for social media, you can do two ad platforms, but learn one at a time (it will take about a year to get good at it), then layer the other on top. However, if you are a romance author, he recommended you use Facebook ads exclusively. Also, submit to BookBub as often as you are eligible. Remember, if you are turned down for a \$0.99 deal, you can resubmit the same title right away for a free deal without waiting a month to resubmit.
4. **Marketing:** Do a promotion or launch at least every other month. To turbocharge your results, do one or more a month (large or small).
5. **Pricing:** His suggested pricing for a series is \$2.99 for book one, \$3.99 for books two and three, then \$4.99 for book four and beyond.
6. **Newsletter:** Build your email list organically by offering novellas, bonus scenes, epilogues, etc., in the front- and backmatter of your books. Engage your readers by sending a monthly (or weekly) newsletter.
7. **Tracking:** Track your royalties, expenses, and organic newsletter subscribers monthly. Track your ads weekly (or daily). To understand if your ads are working, look at the conversion rate and shoot for at least 10–12%.
8. **Formats:** Publish your books in ebook, print, and box sets. If your ebook is killing it, add audio.

If you follow this strategy, after three years, you will have 12 books in a commercial genre (backlist), be able to use two or three traffic sources effectively to sell books, and have your marketing foundation (website, newsletter, etc.) firmly in place. He helped Sally Rigby achieve six figures (gross) for her Cavendish & Walker series using this strategy.

Once you've achieved six figures, he provided guidance on how to level up even more:

1. **Traffic:** Add a traffic source so you have three to four main ones. Combining Amazon and Facebook tend to be good for scaling.
2. **Avoid distraction:** Look for opportunities to expand your reader base, but don't chase every shiny object.

3. **Branding:** Sharpen and hone your brand. Study the top 100 authors in your subgenre in the Kindle store.
4. **Packaging:** Test different blurbs and covers to elevate your game.
5. **Marketing:** Do more and/or larger promotions or bigger launch pushes. Start low and build up.
6. **Releases:** Write more books and increase your release pace.
7. **Formats:** Expand into audio and translations. Though you can add these before you hit six figures, they can be challenging cash-flow wise.
8. **Audience:** Find a bigger audience. Some genres have a ceiling. For example, it is 10 times harder to make a million dollars in cozy mysteries than regular mysteries.
9. **Advanced learning:** There are fewer resources in this area because the market is much smaller. Finding someone to teach you one-on-one is your best bet; learning skills such as Photoshop or spreadsheets is relatively inexpensive (about \$50 an hour).
10. **Outsourcing:** Find a personal assistant or hire someone to help with ads management and marketing.

Using this strategy, Erik helped Erin Johnson double her revenue in 2022 over the previous year (see the slides linked below for the release and promotion schedule she used).

Want the same results? Start now by filling out your release and promotion schedule for the next six months. Aim for a marketing event (launch or promotion) at least every other month. If you have a gap of two or more months, consider how you can reorganize your approach to bridge that gap.

Additional resources

- [80/20 Plan Slides](#)
- [\\$10k Optimal Case Study \(99c Box Set Launch\)](#)
- [Six Figure Masterclass](#)
- [Tracking Template/Video](#)
- [Complete Guide to Facebook Ads](#)



Pam McCutcheon writes romance and nonfiction books for writers under her own name and urban fantasy under the name [Parker Blue](#). She lives in Colorado Springs with her rescue dog, Honey.

Peaceful Publishing

Presented by Alice Briggs

Reported by Tanya Agler

Alice Briggs is a business owner, publisher, writer, teacher, and artist. She loves to assist others to achieve their goals, which is the common thread in all she does.

Negative energy is a noisy traveling companion that slows you down and makes everything harder. This topic came into focus for Alice Briggs after she became involved in the publishing industry and heard many authors engage in negative self-talk. Peaceful Publishing is designed to help authors release their negative emotions, increase their capacity to overcome resistance, and revive their limiting beliefs.

Briggs started the workshop by asking, “What if you could shut up the negative chatter in your head?” She emphasized this is an involved process and not a miracle cure that happens all at once. However, she practices the steps, which has quelled the negativity in her own life.

Briggs’ journey started with her educational background and continued in her career as an occupational therapist. Five years into her practice, she saw many clients with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, more than she expected. Around the same time, her sister was diagnosed with fibromyalgia. These two occurrences led her to study mind-body connections. If one of these connections is out of whack, multiple body systems can then become affected. Briggs added that her sister has since been healed of her fibromyalgia.

Briggs believes 100% of authors have experienced negative emotions. What is negative energy? Every person has a tangible physical energy field that is part of your body and goes to your different systems. Negative energy impacts that field and arises from trauma, your thoughts, mean people, or family dynamics. Negative energy is an inside job that gets stored in your system and ends up coloring the way you see yourself as well as the world around you. By turning negative energy into positivity, your systems are no longer dealing with that gut punch. Instead, positivity helps you move on from trauma. She is using trauma in its broadest definition as anything your subconscious has coded as such. When a person reviews a traumatic ordeal from their past, especially childhood, they may discount that experience. However, once your system tags an occurrence as traumatic, it is.

Her goal for authors confronting their negative energy is not for them to merely return to a position of neutral but to restore authors to their purpose and passion. Briggs believes that people are put here for a purpose. Her personal passion is to help people to overcome negative emotions.

Negative energy can keep authors from fulfilling their purpose. She compares this to a clog in the pipe rather than a jolt of electricity. While negative emotions aren't bad in and of themselves, they become bad when we do not process them in a healthy way. As a result, negativity may have a physical effect on your autoimmune system and other body systems. Another consequence of negative emotions is attracting other people's negative energy. Releasing negative energy can help your physical health as well as help you attract more positive people into your sphere.

Four tools for Peaceful Publishing

For this workshop, she put together a list of four tools to release negative energy with the proviso this is not an exhaustive list:

1. Collarbone statements
2. Forgiveness
3. Belief reset tools
4. Point release

These tools are designed to help authors release the bad and keep the good. When we use these four tools, we can create a void where the negative energy resides and fill that space with positivity.

Collarbone statements

This tool is meant to help you communicate truth from your conscious mind to your subconscious in a way that is energizing and soothing. The messages can vary depending on the time of day and the task the author is completing.

To begin the procedure, the author touches the tender spots about an inch under each collarbone with two fingers and lightly rubs that spot while saying a positive statement three times. For example, if an author is dreading social media marketing or whatever they'd like to overcome, instead of being overwhelmed, the author can say, "I'm capable" three times. When you finish rubbing the collarbone spot, tap the karate chop point on the side of your left hand next to your palm, across from your thumb, to set the statement in the subconscious.

Other example statements may include, "What I can do, I will do, to move toward my goals," or "My business and I will be fine even if I take time off."

Collarbone statements tell your system this is the change you want to accept. During the presentation, Briggs led the audience through the motions of each exercise.

Forgiveness

This one is a major component of the Peaceful Publishing method. Briggs emphasized that forgiveness does not equal trust and it doesn't mean you have to allow the person who committed the offense back in your life. Instead, it is for your benefit so you set yourself free from the negative energy, rather than setting the other person free.

To start the procedure, the author says, “I forgive (insert the author’s name or the offender’s name) for X” three times while tapping the appropriate fingertip point, which corresponds to the index finger point for self-forgiveness; the side of the middle fingertip for forgiveness involving the author’s personal belief system, whether that involves God, the universe, or something else; and the side of the pinky’s fingertip for others. When finished, you tap the karate chop point on either hand three to five times to set the positive statement into your subconscious.

Belief reset tools

Unlike the first two tools, each of which involves specificity in their approach, this one can be more general. You don’t have to know the specific cause for a belief reset. You can simply use the tool to release negative energy and then let the positive energy in.

The way it works is to identify the negative thought and then construct a statement that is its opposite. Some examples of negative thoughts include “I’m a fraud,” “I can’t do something,” or “I’m too afraid to try something new.” You start the procedure by placing the middle three fingertips of your right hand on the middle of your chest under your breastbone and the three middle fingertips of your left hand over your heart, then you tap with your right fingertips while keeping your left hand still on the contact to the heart point.

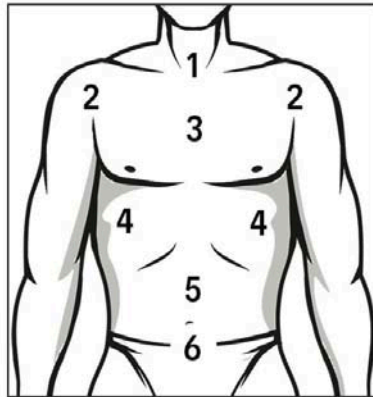
You do this for one minute while thinking about the negativity without amplifying it and making it into something worse than it is. Then you keep contact with both points and reverse the process, tapping the heart point for 60 seconds with your left hand. Then you rub the side of your right wrist with your left hand for one minute while saying the positive thought, followed by rubbing your left wrist with your right hand for one minute. She gives an extra tap on the wrist at the end for extra insurance.

Point release

The tool on the next page is designed to work on different elements of your body.

Release Negative Emotions

Hold the point shown for the emotion you're releasing, and your forehead. Think about releasing that emotion. Hold until you can feel the emotion release or you feel really awkward. Now think of the opposite of that emotion, and hold the points while you set your intention to fill you with that positive emotion in this context.



Point 1 - Loneliness, Frozen, Fear of Missing Out

Point 2 - Betrayal

Point 3 - Rejection, Anger, Shut-down, Disheartened, Burnout, Discouraged

Point 4 - Insecurity

Point 5 - Anxiety

Point 6 - Perfectionism, Invalidated, Incompetent, Unworthy, Fear

On your back



Point 7 - Shame

It connects your negative energy and intention and allows it to flow before it leaves your system. Point release works best when you are specific about your intention. You peel a little bit of the negative energy away and then more peace comes your way. Briggs insists that the more you do these exercises, the more you will feel a subtle release. Hold the point that corresponds to the number of the negative emotion with one hand, and your forehead with the other hand. The magnitude of your emotion determines how long you hold the points.

Once you feel uncomfortable, think of the opposite of that emotion and set your intention on the positive emotion. You can also think about the supportive people in your life, the people who help you.

- Point 1 is located in the middle of your neck and focuses on loneliness, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), and times you're frozen.
- Point 2 is located on each shoulder and focuses on betrayal, which is a big negative emotion in an author's creative career when someone steals an idea or is constantly negative about what you are trying to accomplish. Keep contact with one side at a time.
- Point 3 is located in the middle of the chest about two inches below your neck and focuses on the negative emotions of rejection, anger, shut-down, feeling disheartened, burnout, or discouragement.
- Point 4 is on your ribcage and focuses on insecurity.
- Point 5 is in the center of your stomach area and focuses on anxiety.

- Point 6 is around your navel and focuses on negative feelings of perfectionism, invalidation, incompetence, unworthiness, or fear.
- Point 7 is located on your back around your hip area and focuses on shame.

At the end of every procedure, state a positive mantra such as “I am strong,” or “I am confident,” or “What I do brings good to the world.” Fill the negative void with positive energy.

Q&A

Should you do this on a routine basis or when you need it?

If you are going through a rough season and you are in crisis mode, Briggs recommends picking three of the procedures and doing them three times a day for a week. Then you can taper it down and do them as needed. There are no negative experiences by using these tools on a regular basis. It is helpful to take stock once a week as this is a healthy exercise and it helps you take care of your emotions as you go along in life.

Any suggestions when you have general chaos in your mind?

Briggs recommends the belief reset tool. Once you clear the first piece of chaos, you tend to be able to pinpoint the discomfort and be more specific and then you can use the point release tool.

What if you are experiencing physical pain, fatigue, or other autoimmune symptoms?

Briggs gave a disclaimer at this point. These tools don’t necessarily help with physical issues, such as blood pressure. These tools help you when there is a spiritual or unresolved emotional issue that is leading to negative energy. She has seen positive case studies, including her sister who was diagnosed with fibromyalgia, and she is basing this presentation on those case studies.

Briggs finds purpose in helping authors determine what negative thoughts connect to which of the points and helping them eliminate negative energy.

For information from this presentation, you can visit <http://emotionalandspiritualhealing.com/NINC/>.



Tanya Agler writes sweet contemporary romance set in small towns in the mountains. Her eight Harlequin Heartwarming novels center around the themes of hope and redemption.

Writer's Wellness Workshop:

Tips and Tricks for Mental and Emotional Health

Presented by Debra Holland, Ph. D.

Reported by Harper St. George

Dr. Debra Holland has over 20 years of counseling experience and is a New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of award-winning romance. This combination gives her unique insight into mental health resilience for writers.

Dr. Debra Holland started her presentation by telling us the bad news that, in any given year, 25% of people are either diagnosed or already have a mental illness. The good news is that we are on the verge of a renaissance of treatment options and already have in place life practices to prevent and heal mental illness.

Mental health resilience involves a supportive lifestyle, so when the inevitable life stresses and pain hits, you are in a better state to weather them. More and more research is showing a strong mind/body connection for well-being. What goes on in our minds impacts our bodies and vice versa.

Finding calm

Holland emphasized the importance of finding calm when you are feeling stressed. For example, she struggles with scoliosis and back pain. When she woke up on the Wednesday morning of the conference she could barely walk because of the pain. She wondered how she was going to do the conference when she could barely move, and she was away from her support system. This sent her spiraling mentally and physically. She remembered what hot and cold can do to the brain and remembered there was a hot tub at the hotel. As she sat in the hot water, she focused on the tile around the edge of the hot tub. After a while, she started to pick out a picture in the tile's pattern which had been formed by years of wear and mineral buildup. She focused on the picture, picking out mountains and a horizon in the distance. This helped her to practice mindfulness.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness means not stressing about the future or the past, but being present in what is happening now. She got out of the hot tub only able to walk a little bit better, but finding herself feeling better mentally and able to think clearer. A clearer head helped her remember some other tools she had at her disposal: the stretch her chiropractor did to her hip and that she could do herself, and that she could call a local chiropractor and see them the next day.

Deep breathing is one of the most important tools to calm our bodies and brains in the moment. Anytime you feel yourself tighten, take a deep belly breath.

She asked the attendees if any of them had ever watched a sleeping baby and noticed the way they breathe. Their whole bodies move with each breath. We lose that as we get older and start to tighten up. She was a backward breather. When she inhaled, instead of her lungs expanding, she would pull in. It took her three weeks to practice her breathing and change that.

She had the attendees stand up and practice breathing. She said to breathe in, make sure to expand your stomach, and then breathe out. Make sure that your shoulders are down and not up by your neck. This is called natural breathing. Many found that they were backward breathers, too.

Deep breathing techniques

3-3-3-3 breathing: Inhale from your mouth (or your mouth and nose) for a count of three. Hold for three. Exhale for three. Hold for three.

4-4-7-8 technique: Exhale for a count of four. Inhale through your nose for a count of four. Hold for a count of seven. Exhale audibly from your mouth for a count of eight.

Do these breathing exercises twice a day for a maximum of four breath cycles. After a month, you can increase the amount.

Compassion

Compassion activates the reward centers in the brain, which is soothing. We tend to find it easy to care and be supportive of others but difficult to apply that same compassion to ourselves. Turning compassion inward helps us develop a loving relationship with ourselves. Developing a nurturing, kind inner voice can reduce stress and help us become centered.

Anxiety

Our brains are hard-wired to look for the negative. This helped primitive humans survive. We dwell on negative events or thoughts, making the bad things that happen seem far more important than the good things. (Example: Who has read a negative review about their book and had it stay with them longer than the good reviews?) When we are feeling anxious, we start to mentally catastrophize the future.

Anxiety is the dark side of the creative mind. As creatives, we can visualize our stories like movies in our heads. The clearer our stories, the easier we can write our books. The flip side of our creativity is we can create realistic-seeming fear fantasies that cause physical reactions. This visualization, combined with our bodies' reaction, makes our brains think our fears are real. This can cause a vicious cycle.

Depression

Part of depression is a strong negative narrative. We tell ourselves the dark story of our lives. Our depression lies to us, telling us bad things about ourselves and our lives and even the greater world. Some examples are: "My family would be better off without me." "People don't

like me.” “I’m not a good person.” “The world is an unsafe place.”

She mentioned an article in the *Washington Post* written about Sen. John Fetterman, who had taken time off to be treated for depression. The article mentions a book that his doctor had given him, *Understanding Depression* by J. Raymond DePaulo Jr. Fetterman said that he felt guilty that his parents were so young when they had him and he derailed their lives. “The world can tell you that you won, but all you know is that you’ve lost,” Fetterman said of depression.

With depression and anxiety, we ruminate on whatever dark thoughts are in our heads. It’s like a whirlpool that sucks us down into the darkness of our minds. The more you are used to being pulled into the whirlpool the harder it can be to pull yourself out. Exercise has been proven to be equally helpful as medication in lightening depression, and both together are an even more powerful combination.

Grief and trauma

Most people will give themselves permission to grieve for a lost loved one, but we have other things happen that we don’t give ourselves time off for. Some examples are: loss of a fulfilling job, moving out of a home, and health challenges. These only have to be important to you to be valid.

Trauma occurs when something happens that’s frightening and out of your normal experience. For example, you can feel grief when your mother dies. You are traumatized and grieving when you see your mother killed in an accident.

Grief is a journey that takes time. This is something you move through, not get over. Trauma can occur from what went on in your head, not only the actual event. An example is a robbery situation where the cashier was robbed, and the robber left but nothing happened to the cashier. She still needed time off to recover from being traumatized. Getting out of that trauma is really important and can be difficult.

While trauma can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), it can also lead to post-traumatic growth. Don’t dwell on what *could* have happened. In the example of the robbery victim, instead of, “I could have died,” go to, “I’m blessed, I’m protected, I’m safe.” Pay attention to how you might be traumatizing yourself over things that are not real. The intense emotion + physical response = brain thinking the imaginary situation is real.

Coping with grief or trauma isn’t about “being strong.” You already are strong. Crying and mourning doesn’t make you weak. It makes you sad. Don’t use the “be strong” statement with yourself or others. It’s better to say, “You can do this. Take one step at a time.”

Channel your pain, grief, or trauma into your writing. As authors, one of the best ways to help process our feelings and experiences is through our writing, such as journaling, writing an article, or putting our emotions into our stories. This helps you create realistic circumstances that imbue a richness of emotion in your characters and gives them authenticity. The depth of emotion will resonate with your readers. Healing writing might cause a detour from your WIP, but tell yourself that this detour is necessary.

For example, she wrote a story based on the following experience. She was taking her dog with her to her boyfriend’s boat. After arriving on the boat, she went to the restroom on land

and her boyfriend went to the car to get something. They came back and the dog was gone. They called the dog's name, and she didn't come. She knew the dog had gone into the water and she thought, "If she dies, I will never forgive myself." Luckily, someone saw the dog in the water. Holland was able to get her out with help.

Afterward, she and the dog were wrapped in towels, and she held the dog on her lap, but she was stuck with still feeling a lot of those intense, negative emotions. She immediately thought that she had to put this all down in a story. She started imagining the story, and as she plotted it out in her head, she started to get lost in the story and feel calmer.

Intuition

People can confuse intuition and instinct. Intuition is your personal life guidance, and it's always right. It's interpreting your intuition that can be difficult. Intuition is different from your emotions, from your logic, and even from your instincts. Different people get messages in different ways from their intuition. She has a little voice that talks to her. Yours may talk to you differently. You might have a gut feeling. Tightness in your chest. Goosebumps. Hairs on the back of your neck. Learn to tune into intuition by asking: How did I get the intuitive message? How did I discount it? What can I learn from this?

Healthy boundary-setting and enforcing consequences

Boundary-setting involves clearly stating your expectations and how you will be treated. Consequences are how you will react or what will happen if your boundary is crossed. Be careful about not enforcing your boundaries, because it can make people's behavior escalate.

Example: Training a puppy. You put the puppy in a crate and when it whines to get out you let it out. When you let it out you have taught it whining gets it out. He's going to only escalate that whining if you don't hold strong. It is about you, not the puppy. It's about what you've done with the puppy.

Don't argue to get your point across. Be calm and firm. Stand your ground with distinct, valid points, and without debate. Then disengage. If you fail to enforce your boundary, you've just taught the other person that your declarations are meaningless, and you don't have the fortitude to enforce the consequences. The other person may lose respect for you and continue doing the same behavior.

Sometimes, people's behavior will escalate as they try to manipulate you to give in. Brace yourself for the escalation and stand your ground every time. Giving in, even once, will only reinforce the unacceptable behavior.

Relationships

Most of our joys and sorrows come from relationships. We have the power to make our relationships better and more satisfying, if only within ourselves. Look for ways to praise and acknowledge others every day.

In relationships, practice disengaging when you start to get angry. She feels it in her chest when her anger starts, and she knows then that she needs to get away. Let them know that you need some time away and you will come back at a certain time.

Listen and validate another's feelings. Rather than trying to fix the problem, or acting defensively, or angrily, say, "I understand _ _ _ _ _." If the other person isn't listening and validating your feelings, let them know what you need and what will help you feel better.

Introversion or extroversion

You are an introvert or extrovert based on how you replenish your energy. Introverts replenish through solitude and solitary activities. Introverts can enjoy social activities but become drained by them. You can be an outgoing introvert. You do like being with people but need to spend time alone to recover. Extroverts replenish through people and social activities. Make sure you build energy-enhancing activities into your day.

Self-esteem

To increase your self-esteem:

- Do good things for yourself and others and *remember that you did them* instead of dismissing them and moving on.
- Challenge yourself to do things outside your comfort zone.
- Acknowledge your accomplishments — some type of "Yay, me!"
- Accept the compliments you are given instead of blocking them. For example, if someone tells you that they like your sweater, don't downplay it with some version of, "This old thing? I got it on sale." Don't deflect. Learn to accept the compliment.
- Let go of perfectionism, which is destructive to our mental well-being. Because doing anything perfectly is impossible to achieve, therefore in our minds, we are always failing.

Gratitude

Feeling grateful lights up our brains in a different way from stress, anxiety, and fear, and helps pull us out of those states. Start and end the day with a gratitude practice by saying five things (little or big) that you are grateful for. The more we focus on gratitude, the more centered we become.

Tools for well-being

A fully integrated holistic approach that includes movement, nutrition, and mind-body practices, alongside conventional mental health treatment, is the most effective way to heal and to thrive.

Well-being activities to practice:

- Take in the good.
- Read a good book.
- Practice forgiveness.
- Spend time with animals.
- Take long walks.
- Sit or walk barefoot in the grass.
- Practice mindfulness.

- Help others.
- Put good into the world.
- Prioritize sleep.
- Soak in the beauties of nature.
- Limit being on social media to less than 60 minutes a day.
- Make more eye contact with people and animals.
- Give and receive hugs that last at least 22 seconds.
- Spend time with art and doing creative things.
- Pay attention to, savor, and replay positive moments.
- Listen to upbeat, inspirational, or classical music.
- Supplement with vitamin B12.
- Use sound healing /harmonics with instruments such as a gong, tuning fork, drumming, or singing bowls.
- Self-created sounds such as humming can literally rearrange our molecular structure.
- Tap patterns on your acupuncture points to help change your thoughts or mood or release negative habits. (A good source is Nick Ortner, who has YouTube videos, a book, website, and a newsletter.)
- Expose yourself to heat (sweat lodges, steam showers, hot tubs, saunas) and/or cold (cryotherapy, ice or snow baths, plunging into a cold lake) activities.

Remember that nothing works for everyone. Any of these practices work really well for some people and kind of work for others. Some won't work at all. Find and practice what works for you.

Contact for Debra Holland, Ph. D.

Email: drdebra@earthlink.net

Website: debraholland.com

Website: drdebraholland.com



Harper St. George writes historical fiction romance set in various time periods from the Viking Era to the Gilded Age. Her latest series is *The Gilded Age Heiresses* and her upcoming series is *The Doves of New York*, coming in 2024.

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Smart Marketing for Savvy Authors

By Tawdra Kandle



*This year of Smart Marketing
is all about reinventing our businesses.
For the fourth quarter, we'll cover:
How to maximize author learning;
Lanes, trends, and opportunities;
Planning for the new year!*

'Tis the season... for planning!

There's very little that I love more than a shiny new year, all empty and ready to fill with wonderful plans. December is the perfect month to take some thoughtful time to identify our goals for the next 12 months and then ponder how to best reach them.

That's never truer than when it comes to selling our books—plotting our marketing for the next year is essential to elevating sales and visibility for the future. We all know the old saying that if we fail to plan, we plan to fail, and swinging wildly from idea to project is not a recipe for success.

Trust me, I know this.

For years, I was afraid to make business plans. I felt inept and ill-prepared for running a business; after all, I'd never done anything in my life other than raise and homeschool kids, write curriculum, and juggle a household. The idea of coming up with a realistic, detailed goal and then announcing my intention to pursue it—even to myself—gave me hives. If I made definite plans, it meant that I was taking myself and my business seriously.

So, for far too long, my marketing consisted of submitting random books for BookBub Featured Deals and then, when I scored one, deciding to make that book and series the focus of my promotional attention that month. There was no intention or expectation behind how I did things; no goal, really, and that made it hard to know if I'd achieved anything beyond a rise in Amazon ranking and perhaps a little bump in monthly royalties.

Laying out defined goals and then making plans to reach them is terrifying because we're making ourselves vulnerable by admitting that we want something—sales, success, recognition—and that we want it enough to put in time, energy, and passion to make it happen.

It's also scary because there is a limit to how much we can control when it comes to realizing our goals. Once I took a deep breath and leaped into detailed planning, I realized that while I can focus on a series, apply for paid newsletter promo, look for newsletter swaps, and run social media posts and ads, I can't make vendors recommend my book. I can't force readers to buy it or read it.

When I put my books—and thus myself—out there and declare that I want them to succeed, I risk humiliation when that doesn't happen. It took me a long time to be brave enough to risk that. Once I did, however, I was soon hooked on the process of planning.

There is no lack of advice, courses, and products for authors who are similarly drawn to the idea of laying out what we hope will happen in the future. I've played with a variety of methods and books, and I've taken a few courses. Doing so has helped me to discover what works best for me, which types of planners or processes I tend to keep using instead of giving up after a few months.

This year, I decided to try my hand at being even more intentional as I look at 2024. Way back in mid-October, I persuaded an author friend with whom I work closely to do a Zoom so that we could strategize for the next year. It was so helpful! We discussed which series we wanted to focus on and how we would apply that focus: new releases, discounted first-in-series, and topical promotions. We also kicked around some ideas on joint projects, new ways of gaining visibility, and some thoughts on refreshing our release plans.

On each topic, we asked ourselves and each other a few questions: Will doing this move me in the right direction? Is it something I'm excited about doing? Does it make sense given my other time and energy commitments?

I've been trying to pay more attention to what brings me joy in my career. While there will always be scut work no matter what we do in life, when we can spend more time doing fun stuff, it will move us forward faster. I believe this. For the last year, I've devoted a portion of my time to figuring out how I can make what I consider the non-negotiables (sending a weekly newsletter, posting on social media) more enjoyable. It's helped.

I've been using Sarra Cannon's HB90 method for making planning more fun and adventurous. She usually opens up her popular course at the end of each quarter, and if you happened to catch her workshop at the conference this year, you know she's all about seeking joy in what we do. If her style meshes well with yours and with what you need, I recommend checking out her YouTube videos and perhaps joining her mailing list.

The last change I'm making as I forecast 2024 is that I'm determined to be more realistic about my time and energy limits. In the early days of my career, I often made promises that Future Tawdra had to deliver on, be that a too-ambitious book release schedule, courses that didn't really fit into my schedule, or marketing plans that would fizzle before I could make them happen. This year, I under-planned. I know that for me, 2024 is going to be a year of shifts and changes, and I don't want the ideas I have right now, at the end of 2023, to add more stress.

My overall goal as I look at the next twelve months is that the me in December 2024 will be grateful to me from 2023 because I planned not only for success but also for sanity.

Whatever your plans might be, I wish you a peaceful close to this year and a 2024 that turns out to be even better than you anticipate now.

Tawdra Kandle is the USA Today bestselling author of over 130 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins. She lives in central Florida with a husband, a mischievous pup, and too many cats.

NINC Member Discounts

Two great discounts

By Abigail Drake

'Tis the season for some amazing discounts, and we're featuring two this month. The first is from **Literature and Latte** (aka Scrivener). They are offering a fabulous **20% discount** on their popular writing software for NINC members.

The second discount is on **Jane Friedman's Hot Sheet**. The Hot Sheet offers remarkable publishing industry insights for authors and other creative professionals, and it's delivered directly to you via email every other Wednesday. They are also offering a **20% discount** to NINC members.

To find out about these, and many other freebies and discounts, check out the NINC [website](#).



Abigail Drake, who writes contemporary romance and women's fiction, is the award-winning author of 19 novels. She majored in Japanese and economics in college and spent years living abroad, collecting stories wherever she visited. She and her husband, whom she met in Istanbul, have three adult sons.

Membership Benefits

Need industry intel, software, or legal help? We've got you covered.

Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

As a NINC member, your benefits include industry discounts, newsletter and website articles, professional services directory, networking opportunities, and more.

We've compiled all of these—which you can also find on our website—into this list as a helpful reminder.

Networking (these groups are for NINC members only):

- [Nincklink, email list for all NINC members](#)
- [NINC Facebook group](#)
- [Follow NINC on Twitter](#)
- NINC on [Clubhouse](#): Novelists, Inc. Virtual Tiki Bar
- [NINK Critique](#)/brainstorming group
- [Traditionally published authors](#)
- [Swords & Ray Guns](#): SF/F & speculative fiction writers
- [Authors of thriller/crime/suspense](#)
- [Cover Creators](#): Discuss creating book covers

Conference:

[Conference information](#)

Newsletter

- [Propose an article](#)
- [Submit a letter to the editor](#)
- [Newsletter archives](#)

Website (You must be logged in to access these services.)

- [Legal Fund](#)
- [Sample Letters](#)
- [Articles & Links](#)

Member discounts

NINC members are eligible for certain professional discounts. A complete listing of these can be found at [Member Freebies & Discounts](#) along with other member discounts.

Volunteer

One of the greatest benefits of NINC is the opportunity to volunteer your talents to benefit other members—which pays incredible and unexpected dividends in networking and knowledge. Learn more about volunteer opportunities here: [Open Positions](#)

Open positions include:

- Social Media Committee
- Tweet Team
- Recruiting New Members
- Anything!



Founded in 1989

NINC Statement of Principle

Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve.

NINC is committed to welcoming a diverse and inclusive membership to our organization and serving all members. No author will ever be discriminated against on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual beliefs if any, ability, nationality or age. It is NINC's desire and goal to make sure that every author member feels welcomed and accepted and heard.

Founders

- Rebecca Brandewyne
- Janice Young Brooks
- Jasmine Cresswell
- Maggie Osborne
- Marianne Shock

2023 Board of Directors

If you have questions regarding Novelists, Inc., please contact a member of the Board of Directors.

- President: Celeste Barclay
- President-Elect: Caethes Faron
- Secretary: Sylvia McDaniel
- Treasurer: Timothy Cerepaka
- Newsletter Editor: Harper St. George
- Advisory Council Representative: Steven Womack

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- Barbara Keiler
- Julie Leto
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- Erica Ridley
- Wayne Stinnett
- Vicki Lewis Thompson
- Victoria Thompson
- Steven Womack

2023 Committees

Complete committee member listings are available on the website. Many committee positions are open and looking for new volunteers.

- Central Coordinator: Laura Resnick
- 2023 Conference Committee
 - Conference Director: Mel Jolly
 - Assistant Conf. Director & Programming Chair: Tawdra Kandle
 - Assistant Programming Chair: Dylann Crush
 - Trad Liaison: Lou Aronica
 - Sponsorship Chair: Sarah Woodbury
 - Assistant Sponsorship Chair: Hallee Bridgeman
 - Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
 - Assistant Hotel Liaison: Tegan Maher
 - Registrar: Lisa Hughey
 - Assistant Registrar: Stephanie Julian
 - App Coordinator & Graphic Designer: Laura Hayden
 - NINC After Dark Coordinator: Tamsin Ley
- Authors Coalition Representatives
 - Chair: Rebecca Zanetti
 - Hallee Bridgeman
 - Lynn Morrison
- Bookkeeper: Christy Wilson
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee
 - Chair: Celeste Barclay
 - Misti Boehm
 - Pooks Burroughs
 - Malorie Cooper
 - Lynn Emery
 - Lisa Hughey
 - Tawdra Kandle
 - Ellis Leigh
 - Alison Perry

- Harper St. George
- Social Media Committee
 - Chair: Violet Howe
 - Genevieve Jack
- Membership Committee
 - Boyd Craven
 - Sarah Woodbury
- *Nink* Newsletter
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 - Acquisitions Editor: Trish Milburn
 - Copy Editor: Cynthia Moyer
 - Production Manager: Laura Resnick
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 - Tanya Anne Crosby
 - Michele Dunaway
 - Katherine Garbera
 - Cindy Kirk
 - Nancy Robards Thompson
- Discounts Program: Abigail Drake

Central Coordinator

Novelists, Inc. c/o Laura Resnick
 P.O. Box 331, Covington KY 41012
admin@ninc.com

Address changes may be made on the website.

Nink Newsletter

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Nink's goal is to provide our readers with high-quality articles that offer critical business advice, marketing how-tos, advanced craft coaching, or strategy to continue building a career, all geared to established authors. All members should feel confident that *Nink* provides something for them. We welcome pitches and submissions from all members.

To request reprint rights or to **submit an article proposal**, please contact [the editor](#).

Publication: 12 issues annually. Available in PDF and epub formats. Public issues redact NINC members-only information.

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